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GREAT SHORT-STORIES

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GREAT SHORT-STORIES

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With Introductory Essays on The Great Story Writers

BY
WILLIAM J. DAWSON
AND
CONINGSBY W. DAWSON

Two Volumes in One

HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON

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GREAT SHORT-STORIES

VOLUME ONE

I

THE EVOLUTION OF THE SHORT-STORY

The Evolution of the Short-Story

I

THE short-story commenced its career as a verbal utterance, or, as Robert Louis Stevenson puts it, with "the first men who told their stories round the savage camp-fire."

It bears the mark of its origin, for even to-day it is true that the more it creates the illusion of the speaking-voice, causing the reader to listen and to see, so that he forgets the printed page, the better does it accomplish its literary purpose. It is probably an instinctive appreciation of this fact which has led so many latter-day writers to narrate their short-stories in dialect. In a story which is communicated by the living voice our attention is held primarily not by the excellent deposition of adjectives and poise of style, but by the striding progress of the plot; it is the plot, and action in the plot, alone which we remember when the combination of words which conveyed and made the story real to us has been lost to mind. "Crusoe recoiling from the foot-print, Achilles shouting over against the Trojans, Ulysses bending the great bow, Christian running with his fingers in his ears; these are each culminating moments, and each has been printed on the mind's eye for ever." [1]

The secondary importance of the detailed language in

[1] A Gossip on Romance, from *Memories and Portraits*, by R. L. Stevenson.

which an incident is narrated, when compared with the total impression made by the naked action contained in the incident, is seen in the case of ballad poetry, where a man may retain a vivid mental picture of the localities, atmosphere, and dramatic moments created by Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, or Rossetti's *White Ship*, and yet be quite incapable of repeating two consecutive lines of the verse. In literature of narration, whether prose or verse, the dramatic worth of the action related must be the first consideration.

In earlier days, when much of the current fiction was not written down, but travelled from mouth to mouth, as it does in the Orient to-day, this fact must have been realized —that, in the short-story, plot is superior to style. Among modern writers, however, there has been a growing tendency to make up for scantiness of plot by high literary workmanship; the result has been in reality not a short-story, but a descriptive sketch or vignette, dealing chiefly with moods and landscapes. So much has this been the case that the writer of a recent *Practical Treatise on the Art of the Short-Story* has found it necessary to make the bald statement that "the first requisite of a short-story is that the writer have a story to tell."[1]

However lacking the stories which have come down to us from ancient times may be in technique, they invariably narrate action—they have something to tell. If they had not done so, they would not have been interesting to the men who first heard them, and, had they not been interesting, they would not have survived. Their paramount worth in this respect of *action* is proved by the constant borrowings which modern writers have made from them. Take one case in illustration. In the twenty-

[1] *Short-Story Writing*, by Charles Raymond Barrett.

eighth chapter of Aristotle's *Secretum Secretorum* appears a story in which "a queen of India is said to have treacherously sent to Alexander, among other costly presents, the pretended testimonies of friendship, a girl of exquisite beauty, who, having been fed with serpents from her infancy, partook of their nature." It comes to light again, in an altered and expanded form, in the *Gesta Romanorum*, as the eleventh tale, being entitled *Of the Poison of Sin.*

"Alexander was a prince of great power, and a disciple of Aristotle, who instructed him in every branch of learning. The Queen of the North, having heard of his proficiency, nourished her daughter from the cradle upon a certain kind of deadly poison; and when she grew up, she was considered so beautiful, that the sight of her alone affected many to madness. The queen sent her to Alexander to espouse. He had no sooner beheld her than he became violently enamoured, and with much eagerness desired to possess her; but Aristotle, observing his weakness, said: 'Do not touch her, for if you do, you will certainly perish. She has been nurtured upon the most deleterious food, which I will prove to you immediately. Here is a malefactor who is already condemned to death. He shall be united to her, and you shall soon see the truth of what I advance.'

"Accordingly the culprit was brought without delay to the girl; and scarcely had he touched her lips, before his whole frame was impregnated with poison, and he expired. Alexander, glad at his escape from such imminent destruction, bestowed all thanks on his instructor, and returned the girl to her mother."

After which follows the monkish application of the moral, as long as the entire story: Alexander being made to stand for a good Christian; the Queen of the North for "a superfluity of the things of life, which sometimes de-

stroys the spirit, and generally the body"; the Poison Maid for luxury and gluttony, "which feed men with delicacies that are poison to the soul"; Aristotle for conscience and reason, which reprove and oppose any union which would undo the soul; and the malefactor for the evil man, disobedient unto his God.

There have been at least three writers of English fiction who, borrowing this germ-plot from the *Gesta Romanorum*, have handled it with distinction and originality. Nathaniel Hawthorne, having changed its period and given it an Italian setting, wove about it one of the finest and most imaginative of his short-stories, *Rappaccini's Daughter*. Oliver Wendell Holmes, with a freshness and vigor all his own, developed out of it his fictional biography of *Elsie Venner*. And so recent a writer as Mr. Richard Garnett, attracted by the subtle and magic possibilities of the conception, has given us yet another rendering, restoring to the story its classic setting, in *The Poison Maid*.[1] Thus, within the space of a hundred years, three master-craftsmen have found their inspiration in the slender anecdote which Aristotle, in the opulence of his genius, was content to hurry into a few sentences and bury beneath the mass of his material.

II

Probably the first stories of mankind were *true stories*, but the true story is rarely good art. It is perhaps for this reason that few true stories of early times have come down to us. Mr. Cable, in his *Strange True Stories of Louisiana*, explains the difference between the fabricated tale and the incident as it occurs in life. "The relations

[1] Vide *The Twilight of the Gods and Other Tales*, published by John Lane, 1903.

and experiences of real men and women," he writes, "rarely fall in such symmetrical order as to make an artistic whole. Until they have had such treatment as we give stone in the quarry or gems in the rough, they seldom group themselves with that harmony of values and brilliant unity of interest that result when art comes in—not so much to transcend nature as to make nature transcend herself." In other words, it is not until the true story has been converted into fiction by the suppression of whatever is discursive or ungainly, and the addition of a stroke of fantasy, that it becomes integral, balanced in all its parts, and worthy of literary remembrance.

In the fragments of fiction which have come down to us from the days when books were not, odd chapters from the Fieldings and Smollets of the age of Noah, remnants of the verbal libraries which men repeated one to the other, squatting round "the savage camp-fire," when the hunt was over and night had gathered, the stroke of fantasy predominates and tends to comprise the whole. Men spun their fictions from the materials with which their minds were stored, much as we do to-day, and the result was a cycle of beast-fables—an Odyssey of the brute creation. Of these the tales of Æsop are the best examples. The beast-fable has never quite gone out of fashion, and never will so long as men retain their world-wonder, and childishness of mind. A large part of Gulliver's adventures belong to this class of literature. It was only the other day that Mr. Kipling gave us his *Just-so Stories*, and his *Jungle-Book*, each of which found an immediate and secure place in the popular memory.

Mr. Chandler Harris, in his introduction to *Uncle Remus*, warns us that however humorous his book may appear, "its intention is perfectly serious." He goes on to insist on its historic value, as a revelation of primitive modes of

thought. At the outset, when he wrote his stories serially for publication in *The Atlanta Constitution*, he believed that he was narrating plantation legends peculiar to the South. He was quickly undeceived. Prof. J. W. Powell, who was engaged in an investigation of the mythology of the North American Indians, informed him that some of Uncle Remus's stories appear "in a number of different languages, and in various modified forms among the Indians." Mr. Herbert H. Smith had "met with some of these stories among tribes of South American Indians, and one in particular he had traced to India, and as far east as Siam."

"When did the negro or North American Indian ever come in contact with the tribes of South America?" Mr. Harris asks. And he quotes Mr. Smith's reply in answer to the question: "I am not prepared to form a theory about these stories. There can be no doubt that some of them, found among the negroes and the Indians, had a common origin. The most natural solution would be to suppose that they originated in Africa, and were carried to South America by the negro slaves. They are certainly found among the Red Negroes; but, unfortunately for the African theory, it is equally certain that they are told by savage Indians of the Amazon's Valley, away up on the Tapajos, Red Negro, and Tapurá. These Indians hardly ever see a negro. . . . It is interesting to find a story from Upper Egypt (that of the fox who pretended to be dead) identical with an Amazonian story, and strongly resembling one found by you among the negroes. . . . One thing is certain. The animal stories told by the negroes in our Southern States and in Brazil were brought by them from Africa. Whether they originated there, or with the Arabs, or Egyptians, or with yet more ancient nations, must still be an open question. Whether the Indians got them from the negroes or from some earlier source is equally uncertain."

Whatever be the final solution to this problem, enough has been said to show that the beast-fable is, in all probability, the most primitive form of short-story which we possess.

III

For our purpose, that of tracing the evolution of the English short-story, its history commences with the *Gesta Romanorum.* At the authorship of this collection of mediæval tales, many guesses have been made. Nothing is known with certainty; it seems probable, however, judging from the idioms which occur, that it took its present form in England, about the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century, and thence passed to the Continent. The work is written in Latin, and was evidently compiled by a man in holy orders, for its guiding purpose is to edify. In this we can trace the influence of Æsop's beast-fables, which were moral lessons drawn from the animal creation for the instruction of mankind. Every chapter of the *Gesta Romanorum* consists of a moral tale; so much so that in many cases the application of the moral is as long as the tale itself.

The title of the collection, *The Deeds of the Romans,* is scarcely justified; in the main it is a garnering of all the deathless plots and dramatic motives which we find scattered up and down the ages, in the legend and folklore of whatsoever nation. The themes of many of its stories were being told, their characters passing under other names, when Romulus and Remus were suckled by their wolf-mother, before there was a Roman nation or a city named Rome.

In the Bible we have many admirable specimens of the short-story. Jotham's parable of the trees of the wood choosing a king is as good an instance of the nature-fable,

touched with fine irony and humor, as could be found. The Hebrew prophet himself was often a story-teller. Thus, when Nathan would bring home the nature of his guilt to David, he does it by a story of the most dramatic character, which loses nothing, and indeed gains all its terrific impact, by being strongly impregnated with moral passion. Many such instances will occur to the student of the Bible. In the absence of a written or printed literature the story-teller had a distinct vocation, as he still has among the peoples of the East. Every visitor to Tangier has seen in the market-place the professional story-teller, surrounded from morn till night with his groups of attentive listeners, whose kindling eyes, whose faces moved by every emotion of wonder, anger, tenderness, and sympathy, whose murmured applause and absorbed silence, are the witnesses and the reward of his art. Through such a scene we recover the atmosphere of the Arabian Nights, and indeed look back into almost limitless antiquity. Possibly, could we follow the story which is thus related, we might discover that this also drew its elemental incidents from sources as old as the times of Jotham and Nathan.

The most that can be said for the Latin origin of the *Gesta Romanorum* is that the nucleus is made up of extracts, frequently of glaring inaccuracy, from Roman writers and historians. The Cologne edition comprises one hundred and eighty-one chapters, each consisting of a tale or anecdote followed by a moral application, commencing formally with the words, "My beloved, the prince is intended to represent any good Christian," or, "My beloved, the emperor is Christ; the soldier is any sinner" They are not so much short-stories as illustrated homilies. In the literary armory of the lazy parish priest of the fourteenth century, the *Gesta Romanorum* must have held

the place which volumes of sermon-outlines occupy upon the book-shelves of certain of his brethren to-day.

"The method of instructing by fables is a practice of remote antiquity; and has always been attended with very considerable benefit. Its great popularity encouraged the monks to adopt this medium, not only for the sake of illustrating their discourses, but of making a more durable impression upon the minds of their illiterate auditors. An abstract argument, or logical deduction (had they been capable of supplying it), would operate but faintly upon intellects rendered even more obtuse by the rude nature of their customary employments; while, on the other hand, an apposite story would arouse attention and stimulate that blind and unenquiring devotion which is so remarkably characteristic of the Middle Ages."[1]

IV

The influence of the *Gesta Romanorum* is most conspicuously to be traced in the work of Gower, Chaucer, and Lydgate; but it has served as a source of inspiration to the flagging ingenuity of each succeeding generation. It would be tedious to enter on an enumeration of the various indebtednesses of English literature to these early tales. A few instances will serve as illustration.

It seems a far cry from the *The Ingoldsby Legends* to *The Deeds of the Romans*, nevertheless *The Leech of Folkstone* was directly taken from the hundred and second tale, *Of the Transgressions and Wounds of the Soul.* Shakespeare himself was a frequent borrower, and planned his entire play of *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, upon the hundred and fifty-third tale, *Of Temporal Tribulation.* In some

[1] Introduction to *Gesta Romanorum*, translated by the Rev. Charles Swan, revised and corrected by Wynnard Hooper, B.A.

cases the language is almost identical, as for instance in the fifth tale, where the king warns his son, saying, "Son, I tell thee that thou canst not confide in her, and consequently ought not to espouse her. *She deceived her own father when she liberated thee from prison;* for this did her father lose the price of thy ransom." Compare with this:

> "Look to her, Moor; have a quick eye to see;
> *She has deceived her father, and may thee.*"[1]

But the ethical treatment of the short-story, as exemplified in these monkish fables, handicapped its progress and circumscribed its field of endeavor. Morality necessitated the twisting of incidents, so that they might harmonize with the sermonic summing-up that was in view. Life is not always moral; it is more often perplexing, boisterous, unjust, and flippant. The wicked dwell in prosperity. "There are no pangs in their death; their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued as other men. They have more than heart could wish." But the art of the teller of tales "is occupied, and bound to be occupied not so much in making stories true as in making them typical."[2]

The ethical method of handling fiction falls between two stools; it not only fails in portraying that which is true for the individual, but it incurs the graver error of ceasing to be true to the race, *i. e.*, typical.

It would be interesting, had we space, to follow Shakespeare in his borrowings, noticing what he adopts and incorporates in his work as artistically true, and what he rejects. Like a water-color landscape-painter, he pauses above the box of crude materials which others have made,

[1] *Othello*, act I, scene III.

[2] From a Humble Remonstrance, in *Memories and Portraits*, by R. L. Stevenson.

takes a dab here and a dab there with his brush, rarely takes all of one color, blends them, eyes the result judicially, and flashes in the combination with swiftness and certainty of touch.

For instance, from the lengthy story which appears as the hundred and first tale in Mr. Douce's edition of the *Gesta*, he selects but one scene of action, yet it is the making of *Macbeth*—one would almost suppose that this was the germ-thought which kindled his furious fancy, preceding his discovery of the Macbeth tradition as related in Holinshed's *Chronicle*.[1]

The Emperor Manelay has set forth to the Holy Land, leaving his empress and kingdom in his brother's care. No sooner has he gone than the regent commences to make love to his brother's wife. She rejects him scornfully. Angered by her indignation, he leads her into a forest and hangs her by the hair upon a tree, leaving her there to starve. As good-fortune will have it, on the third day a noble earl comes by, and, finding her in that condition, releases her, takes her home with him, and makes her governess to his only daughter. A feeling of shame causes her to conceal her noble rank, and so it comes about that the earl's steward aspires to her affection. Her steadfast refusal of all his advances turns his love to hatred, so that he plans to bring about her downfall. Then comes the passage which Shakespeare seized upon as vital: "It befell upon a night that the earl's chamber door was forgotten and left unshut, which the steward had anon perceived; and when they were all asleep he went and espied the light of the lamp where the empress and the young maid lay together, and with that he drew out his knife and cut the throat of the earl's daughter and put the knife into

[1] *The Chronicle of England and Scotland*, first published in 1577.

the empress's hand she being asleep, and nothing knowing thereof, to the intent that when the earl awakened he should think that she had cut his daughter's throat, and so would she be put to a shameful death for his mischievous deed."

The laws of immediateness and concentration, which govern the short-story, are common also to the drama; by reason of their brevity both demand a directness of approach which leads up, without break of sequence or any waste of words, through a dependent series of actions to a climax which is final. It will usually be found in studying the borrowings which the masters have made from such sources as the *Gesta Romanorum* that the portions which they have discriminated as worth taking from any one tale have been the only artistically essential elements which the narrative contains; the remainder, which they have rejected, is either untrue to art or unnecessary to the plot's development.

These tales, as told by their monkish compiler, lack "that harmony of values and brilliant unity of interest that results when art comes in"—they are splendid jewels badly cut.

V

As has been already stated, a short-story theme, however fine, can only be converted into good art by the suppression of whatever is discursive or ungainly, so that it becomes integral and balanced in all its parts; and by the addition of a stroke of fantasy, so that it becomes vast, despite its brevity, implying a wider horizon than it actually describes; but, in excess of these qualities, there is a last of still greater importance, without which it fails—*the power to create the impression of having been possible.*

Now the beast-fable, as handled by Æsop, falls short of

being high art by reason of its overwhelming fantasy, which annihilates all chance of its possibility. The best short-stories represent a struggle between fantasy and fact. And the mediæval monkish tale fails by reason of the discursiveness and huddling together of incidents, without regard to their dramatic values, which the moral application necessitates. In a word, both are deficient in technique—the concealed art which, when it has combined its materials so that they may accomplish their most impressive effect, causes the total result to command our credulity because it seems typical of human experience.

The technique of the English prose short-story had a tardy evolution. That there were any definite laws, such as obtain in poetry, by which it must abide was not generally realized until Edgar Allan Poe formulated them in his criticism of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

As he states them, they are five in number, as follows: Firstly, that the short-story must be short, *i. e.*, capable of being read at one sitting, in order that it may gain "the immense force derivable from *totality*." Secondly, that the short-story must possess *immediateness;* it should aim at a single or unique effect—"if the very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then it has failed in its first step." Thirdly, that the short-story must be subjected to *compression;* "in the whole composition there should not be one word written of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design." Fourthly, that it must assume the aspect of *verisimilitude;* "truth is often, and in very great degree, the aim of the tale—some of the finest tales are tales of ratiocination." Fifthly, that it must give the impression of *finality;* the story, and the interest in the characters which it introduces, must begin with the opening sentence and end with the last.

These laws, and the technique which they formulate, were first discovered and worked out for the short-story in the medium of poetry.[1] The ballad and narrative poem must be, by reason of their highly artificial form, comparatively short, possessing totality, immediateness, compression, verisimilitude, and finality. The old ballad which commemorates the battle of Otterbourne, fought on August 10, 1388, is a fine example of the short-story method. Its opening stanza speaks the last word in immediateness of narration:

> "It felle abowght the Lamasse tyde,
> When husbands wynn ther haye,
> The dowghtye Dowglasse bowynd hym to ryde
> In England to take a praye."

Thomas Hood's poem of *The Dream of Eugene Aram*, written at a time when the prose short-story, under the guidance of Hawthorne and Poe, was just beginning to take its place as a separate species of literary art, has never been surpassed for short-story technique by any of the practitioners of prose. Prof. Brander Matthews has pointed out that "there were nine muses in Greece of old, and no

[1] Poe himself implies this when he says, in an earlier passage of his essay on Hawthorne: "The Tale Proper" (*i. e.*, short-story), "in my opinion, affords unquestionably the fairest field for the exercise of the loftiest talent which can be afforded by the wide domains of mere prose. Were I bidden to say how the highest genius could be most advantageously employed for the best display of its own powers, I should answer, without hesitation, in the composition of a rhymed poem, not to exceed in length what might be perused in an hour. Within this limit alone can the highest order of true poetry exist. I need only here say, upon this topic, that in almost all classes of composition the unity of effect or impression is a point of the greatest importance. *It is clear*, moreover, *that this unity cannot be thoroughly preserved in productions whose perusal cannot be completed at one sitting.*"

one of these daughters of Apollo was expected to inspire the writer of prose-fiction."[1]

He argues from this that "prose seemed to the Greeks, and even to the Latins who followed in their footsteps, as fit only for pedestrian purposes." It is more probable that, as regards prose-fiction, they did not realize that they were called upon to explain the omission of the tenth muse. Her exclusion was based on no reasoned principle, but was due to a sensuous art-instinct: the Greeks felt that the unnatural limitations of the poetic medium were more in keeping with the unnatural[2] brevity of a story which must be short. The exquisite prose tales which have been handed down to us belong to the age of their decadence as a nation; in their great period their tellers of brief tales unconsciously cast their rendering in the poetic mould.[3] In natures of the highest genius the most arduous is instinctively the favorite task.

Chaucer, by reason of his intimate acquaintance with both the poetry and prose-fiction of Boccaccio, had the opportunity to choose between these two mediums of short-story narration; and he chose the former. He was as familiar with Boccaccio's poetic method, as exemplified in the *Teseide*, as with his prose, as exemplified at much greater length in the *Decameron*, for he borrowed from them both.

[1] In his introduction to *Materials and Methods of Fiction*, by Clayton Hamilton, published by the Baker & Taylor Co., New York.

[2] "The short-story is artificial, and to a considerable degree unnatural. It could hardly be otherwise, for it takes out of our complex lives a single person or a single incident and treats that as if it were complete in itself. Such isolation is not known to nature." —Page 22 of *Short-Story Writing*, by Charles Raymond Barrett, published by the Baker & Taylor Co., New York.

[3] For example, the story told by Demodocus of *The Illicit Love of Ares for Aphrodite, and the Revenge which Hephaestus Planned* —Odyssey, Bk. VIII.

Yet in only two instances in the *Canterbury Tales* does he relapse into prose.

The *Teseide* in Chaucer's hands, retaining its poetic medium, is converted into the *Knight's Tale;* while the *Reeve's Tale,* the *Franklin's,* and the *Shipman's,* each borrowed from the prose version of the *Decameron,* are given by him a poetic setting. This preference for poetry over prose as a medium for short-story narration cannot have been accidental or unreasoned on his part; nor can it be altogether accounted for by the explanation that "he was by nature a poet," for he *did* experiment with the prose medium to the extent of using it twice. He had the brilliant and innovating precedent of the *Decameron,* and yet, while adopting some of its materials, he abandoned its medium. He was given the opportunity of ante-dating the introduction of technique into the English prose short-story by four hundred and fifty years, and he disregarded it almost cavalierly. How is such wilful neglect to be accounted for? Only by his instinctive feeling that the technique, which Boccaccio had applied in the *Decameron,* belonged by right to the realm of poetry, had been learned in the practising of the poetic art, and could arrive at its highest level of achievement only in that medium.

That in Chaucer's case this choice was justified cannot be disputed; the inferiority of the short-story technique contained in his two prose efforts, when compared with that displayed in the remainder of the *Canterbury Tales,* is very marked. Take, for instance, the *Prioress' Tale* and apply to it the five short-story tests established by Poe, as a personal discovery, four and a half centuries later; it survives them all. It attains, in addition, the crowning glory, coveted by Stevenson, of appearing *typical.* There may never have been a Christian child who was martyred by the Jews in the particularly gruesome way described—

probably there never was; but, in listening to the Prioress, it does not enter into our heads to doubt her word—the picture which she leaves with us of how the Christian regarded the Jew in the Middle Ages is too vivid to allow any breathing-space for incredulity. No knowledge of mediæval anti-Jewish legislation, however scholarly, can bring us to realize the fury of race-hatred which then existed more keenly than this story of a little over two thousand words. By its perusal we gain an illuminating insight into that ill-directed religious enthusiasm which led men on frenzied quests for the destruction of the heretic in their own land and of the Saracen abroad, causing them to become at one and the same time unjust and heroic. In a word, within the compass of three hundred lines of verse, Chaucer contrives to body forth his age—to give us something which is *typical.*

The *Morte D'Arthur* of Malory is again a collection of traditional stories, as is the *Gesta Romanorum,* and not the creative work of a single intellect. As might be expected, it straggles, and overlays its climax with a too-lavish abundance of incidents; it lacks the *harmony of values* which results from the introduction of a unifying purpose—*i. e.,* of art. Imaginative and full of action though the books of the *Morte D'Arthur* are, it remained for the latter-day artist to exhaust their individual incidents of their full dramatic possibilities. From the eyes of the majority of modern men the brilliant quality of their magic was concealed, until it had been disciplined and refashioned by the severe technique of the short-story.

By the eighteenth century the influence of Malory was scarcely felt at all; but his imaginativeness, as interpreted by Tennyson, in *The Idylls of the King,* and by William Morris, in his *Defence of Guinevere,* has given to the Anglo-Saxon world a new romantic background for its thoughts.

The Idylls of the King are not Tennyson's most successful interpretation. The finest example of his superior short-story craftsmanship is seen in the triumphant use which he makes of the theme contained in *The Book of Elaine,* in his poem of *The Lady of Shalott.* Not only has he remodelled and added fantasy to the story, but he has threaded it through with *atmosphere*—an entirely modern attribute, of which more must be said hereafter.

So much for our contention that the laws and technique of the prose short-story, as formulated by Poe, were first instinctively discovered and worked out in the medium of poetry.

VI

"*The Golden Ass* of Apuleius is, so to say, a beginning of modern literature. From this brilliant medley of reality and romance, of wit and pathos, of fantasy and observation, was born that new art, complex in thought, various in expression, which gives a semblance of frigidity to perfection itself. An indefatigable youthfulness is its distinction."[1]

An indefatigable youthfulness was also the prime distinction of the Elizabethan era's writings and doings; it was fitting that such a period should have witnessed the first translation into the English language of this Benjamin of a classic literature's old age.

Apuleius was an unconventional cosmopolitan in that ancient world which he so vividly portrays; he was a barbarian by birth, a Greek by education, and wrote his book in the Romans' language. In his use of luminous slang for literary purposes he was Rudyard Kipling's prototype.

[1] From the introduction, by Charles Whibley, to the Tudor Translations' edition by W. E. Henley, of *The Golden Ass of Apuleius,* published by David Nutt, London, 1893. All other quotations bearing upon Apuleius are taken from the same source.

"He would twist the vulgar words of every-day into quaint unheard-of meanings, nor did he deny shelter to those loafers and footpads of speech which inspire the grammarian with horror. On every page you encounter a proverb, a catchword, a literary allusion, a flagrant redundancy. One quality only was distasteful to him—the commonplace."

There are other respects in which we can trace Mr. Kipling's likeness: in his youthful precocity—he was twenty-five when he wrote his *Metamorphoses;* in his daring as an innovator; in his manly stalwartness in dealing with the calamities of life; in his adventurous note of world-wideness and realistic method of handling the improbable and uncanny.

Like all great artists, he was a skilful borrower from the literary achievements of a bygone age; and so successfully does he borrow that we prefer his copy to the original. The germ-idea of Kipling's *Finest Story in the World* is to be found in Poe's *Tale of the Ragged Mountains;* Apuleius's germ-plot, of the man who was changed by enchantment into an ass, and could only recover his human shape by eating rose-leaves, was taken either from Lucian or from Lucius of Patrae. In at least three of his interpolations he remarkably foreshadows the prose short-story method, upon which we are wont to pride ourselves as being a unique discovery of the past eight decades: these are *Bellepheron's Story; The Story of Cupid and Psyche,* one of the most exquisite both in form and matter in any language or age; and the story of *The Deceitful Woman and the Tub,* which Boccaccio made use of in his *Decameron* as the second novel for the seventh day.

In the intense and visual quality of the atmosphere with which he pervades his narrative he has no equal among the writers of English prose-fiction until Sir Walter Scott

appears. "Apuleius has enveloped his world of marvels in a heavy air of witchery and romance. You wander with Lucius across the hills and through the dales of Thessaly. With all the delight of a fresh curiosity you approach its far-seen towns. You journey at midnight under the stars, listening in terror for the howling of the wolves or the stealthy ambush. At other whiles you sit in the robbers' cave and hear the ancient legends of Greece retold. The spring comes on, and 'the little birds chirp and sing their steven melodiously.' Secret raids, ravished brides, valiant rescues, the gayest intrigues—these are the diverse matters of this many-colored book."

But as a short-story writer he shares the failing of all his English brothers in that art, until James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, penned his tales—namely, that his short-stories do not stand apart, as things total in themselves, but are woven into a larger narrative by whose proportions they are dwarfed, so that their true completeness is disguised. "He cares not how he loiters by the way; he is always ready to beguile his reader with a Milesian story—one of those quaint and witty interludes which have travelled the world over and become part, not merely of every literature, but of every life." It is to three of these chance loiterings of this Kipling of Rome in its decadence that we owe the famous stories alluded to above.

To the Elizabethan period belong the most masterly translations of which the English language is possessed; and this not by virtue of their accuracy and scholarship, but because, to use Doctor Johnson's words, the translator "exhibits his author's thoughts in such a dress as the author would have given them had his language been English." That same "indefatigable youthfulness" which converted courtiers into sailors and despatched them into unknown seas to ransack new worlds, urged men of the

pen to seek out and to pillage, with an equal ardor of adventure, the intellectual wealth of their contemporaries in other lands and the buried and forgotten stores of the ancients upon their own neighboring book-shelves. A universal and contagious curiosity was abroad. To this age belong William Paynter's version of the *Decameron*, entitled *The Palace of Pleasure*, 1566, from which Shakespeare borrowed; Geoffrey Fenton's translation of Bandello's *Tragical Discourses*, 1567; Sir Thomas North's rendering of *Plutarch's Lives*, 1579; Thomas Underdowne's *Heliodorus*, 1587; Thomas Shelton's *Don Quixote*, 1612; and others too numerous to mention. It seems extraordinary at first sight that when such models of advanced technique were set before them, Englishmen were so slow to follow; for though Professor Baldwin is probably correct in his analysis of the *Decameron* when he states that, of the hundred tales, over fifty are not much more than anecdotes, about forty are but outlined plots, three follow the modern short-story method only part way, and, of the hundred, two[1] alone are perfect examples, yet those two perfect examples remained and were capable of imitation. The explanation of this neglect is, perhaps, that the Elizabethans were too busy originating to find time for copying; they were very willing to borrow ideas, but must be allowed to develop them in their own way—usually along dramatic lines for stage purposes, because this was at that time the most financially profitable.

VII

The blighting influence of constitutional strife and intestine war which followed in the Stuarts' reigns turned the serious artist's thoughts aside to grave and prophetic

[1] The second novel of the second day, and the sixth of the ninth day.

forms of literary utterance, while writers of the frivolous sort devoted their talent to a lighter and less sincere art than that of the short-story—namely, court-poetry. It was an age of extremes which bred despair and religious fervor in men of the Puritan party, as represented by Bunyan and Milton, and conscious artificiality and mock heroics in those of the Cavalier faction, as represented by Herrick and the Earl of Rochester.

The examples of semi-fictional prose which can be gathered from this period serve only to illustrate how the short-story instinct, though stifled, was still present. Isaak Walton as a diarist had it; Thomas Fuller as an historian had it; John Bunyan as an ethical writer had it. Each one was possessed of the short-story faculty, but only manifested it, as it were, by accident. Not until Daniel Defoe and the rise of the newspaper do we note any advance in technique. Defoe's main contribution was the *short-story essay*, which stands midway between the anecdote, or germ-plot, buried in a mass of extraneous material, and the short-story proper. The growth of this form, as developed by Swift, Steel, Addison, Goldsmith, and Lamb, has been traced and criticised elsewhere.[1] It had this one great advantage that, whatever its departures from the strict technique of the modern short-story, it was capable of being read at one sitting, stood by itself, and gained "the immense force derivable from *totality*."

In the *True Revelation of the Apparition of One Mrs. Veal*, Defoe is again strangely in advance of his time, as he is in so many other ways. Here is an almost perfect example of the most modern method of handling a ghost-tale. Surely, in whatever department of literature we seek, we

[1] In the third chapter of *The Great English Essayists*, vol. iii of *The Reader's Library*, published by Messrs. Harper & Brothers, 1909.

shall find nothing to surpass it in the quality of *verisimilitude*. The way in which Drelincourt's *Book on Death* is introduced and subsequently twice referred to is a master-stroke of genius. In days gone by, before they were parted, we are told, Mrs. Veal and Mrs. Bargrave "would often console each other's adverse fortunes, and read together Drelincourt *On Death* and other good books." At the time when the story opens Mrs. Bargrave has gone to live in Canterbury, and Mrs. Veal is in Dover. To Mrs. Bargrave in Canterbury the apparition appears, though she does not know that it is an apparition, for there is nothing to denote that it is not her old friend still alive. One of the first things the apparition does is "to remind Mrs. Bargrave of the many friendly offices she did her in former days, and much of the conversation they had with each other in the times of their adversity; what books they read, and what comfort in particular they received from Drelincourt's *Book on Death*. Drelincourt, she said, had the clearest notions of death and of the future state of any who had handled that subject. Then she asked Mrs. Bargrave whether she had Drelincourt. She said, 'Yes.' Says Mrs. Veal, 'Fetch it.' Some days after, when Mrs. Bargrave, having discovered that the visitor was a ghost, has gone about telling her neighbors, Defoe observes, 'Drelincourt's *Book on Death* is, since this happened, bought up strangely.'"

This masterpiece of Defoe is before its time by a hundred years; nothing can be found in the realm of the English prose short-story to approach it in symmetry until the Ettrick Shepherd commenced to write.

Of all the models of prose-fiction which the Tudor translations had given to English literature, the first to be copied was that of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, rendered into English by Thomas Shelton in 1612. Swift must have had the

rambling method of Cervantes well in mind when he wrote his *Gulliver;* and Smollett confessedly took it as his pattern and set out to imitate. The most that was required by such a method in the way of initial construction was to select a hero, give some account of his early history, from the day of his birth up to the point where the true narrative commences, and then send him upon his travels. Usually it was thought necessary to have a Sancho to act as background to Don Quixote; thus Crusoe is given his Man Friday, Tom Jones his Mr. Partridge, and Roderick Random his Strap; but this was not always done, for both Gulliver and the hero of the *Sentimental Journey* set out on their journeyings unaccompanied. The story which grew out of such a method usually consisted of a series of plots, anecdotes, and incidents linked together only by the characters, and governed by no unifying purpose which made each one a necessary and ascending step toward a prearranged climax. These early novels are often books of descriptive travel rather than novels in the modern sense; the sole connection between their first incident and their last being the long road which lies between them, and has been traversed in the continual company of the same leading characters. Many of the chapters, taken apart from their context, are short-story themes badly handled. Some of them are mere interpolations introduced on the flimsiest of excuses, which arrest the progress of the main narrative—*i. e.*, the travel—and give the author an opportunity to use up some spare material which he does not know what to do with. Such are "The Man of the Hill," in *Tom Jones;* "The History of Melopoyn the Playwright," in *Roderick Random;* the "Memoirs of a Lady of Quality," occupying fifty-three thousand words, in *Peregrine Pickle;* "The Philosophic Vagabond," in the *Vicar of Wakefield;* and "Wandering Willie's Tale," in *Redgauntlet.*

The reason why the eighteenth-century novelist did not know what to do with these materials was, in certain cases, that he had discovered a true short-story theme and was perplexed by it. He knew that it was good—his artist's instinct made him aware of that; but somehow, to his great bewilderment and annoyance, it refused to be expanded. So, in order that it might not be entirely lost to him, he tied the little boat on behind the great schooner of his main narration, and set them afloat together.

By the modern reader, whether of the short-story or the novel, the lack of atmosphere and of immediateness in eighteenth-century prose-fiction is particularly felt. There is no use made of landscapes, moods, and the phenomena of nature; the story happens at almost any season of the year. Of these things and their use the modern short-story writer is meticulously careful. By how much would the worth of Hardy's *The Three Strangers* be diminished if the description of the March rain driving across the Wessex moorland were left out? Before he commences the story contained in *A Lodging for the Night*, Stevenson occupies three hundred words in painting the picture of Paris under snow. In the same way, in his story of *The Man Who Would Be King*, Kipling is at great pains to make us burn with the scorching heat which, in the popular mind, is associated with India. For such effects you will search the prose-fiction of the eighteenth century in vain; whereas the use of *atmosphere* has been carried to such extremes to-day by certain writers that the short-story in their hands is in danger of becoming all atmosphere and no story.

The impression created by the old technique, such as it was, when contrasted with the new, when legitimately handled, is the difference between reading a play and seeing it staged.

As regards immediateness of narration, Laurence Sterne may, perhaps, be pointed out as an example. But he is not immediate in the true sense; he is abrupt, and this too frequently for his own sly purposes—which have nothing to do with either technique or the short-story.

Most of the English short-stories, previous to those written by James Hogg, are either prefaced with a biography of their main characters or else the biography is made to do service as though it were a plot—nothing is left to the imagination. Even in the next century, when the short-story had come to be recognized in America, through the example set by Hawthorne and Poe, as a distinct species of literary art, the productions of British writers were too often nothing more than compressed novels. In fact, it is true to say that there is more of short-story technique in the short-story essays of Goldsmith and Lamb than can be found in many of the brief tales of Dickens and Anthony Trollope, which in their day passed muster unchallenged as short-stories.

VIII

But between the irrelevant brief story, interpolated in a larger narrative, and the perfect short-story, which could not be expanded and is total in itself, of Hawthorne and Poe, there stands the work of a man who is little known in America, and by no means popular in England, that of the Ettrick Shepherd, James Hogg. He was born in Scotland, among the mountains of Ettrick and Yarrow, the son of a shepherd. When he was but six years old he commenced to earn his living as a cowherd, and by his seventh year had received all the schooling which he was destined to have —two separate periods of three months. Matthew Arnold, when accounting for the sterility of Gray as a poet, says

that throughout the first nine decades of the eighteenth century, until the French Revolution roused men to generosity, "a spiritual east wind was blowing." Hogg's early ignorance of letters had at least this advantage, that it saved him from the blighting intellectual influences of his age—left him unsophisticated, free to find in all things matter for wonder, and to work out his mental processes unprejudiced by a restraining knowledge of other men's past achievements. In his eighteenth year he taught himself to read, choosing as his text-books Henry the Minstrel's *Life and Adventures of Sir William Wallace* and the *Gentle Shepherd* of Allan Ramsay. Not until his twenty-sixth year did he acquire the art of penmanship, which he learned "upon the hillside by copying the Italian alphabet, using his knee as his desk, and having the ink-bottle suspended from his button." During the next fourteen years he followed his shepherd's calling, making it romantic with sundry more or less successful attempts at authorship. He had reached his fortieth year before he abandoned sheep-raising and journeyed to Edinburgh, there definitely to adopt the literary career. He was by this time firm in his philosophy of life and established in his modes of thought; whatever else he might not be, among townsmen and persons of artificial training, his very simplicity was sure to make him original. In his forty-seventh year, having so far cast his most important work into the poetic form, he contributed to *Blackwood's Magazine* his *Shepherd's Calendar*, followed in the same year by the publishing of *The Brownie of Bodsbeck;* these were his first two serious excursions into the realm of prose-fiction. From then on until his death, in 1835, he continued his efforts in this direction, pouring out a mass of country-side tradition and fairy-folklore, amazing in its fantasy and wealth of drama.

For the imparting of *atmosphere* to his stories, a talent so conspicuously lacking not only in his predecessors, but also in many of his contemporaries, he had a native faculty. The author of *Bonny Kilmeny* could scarcely fail in this respect, when he turned his attention from poetry to prose. He had lived too close to nature to be able ever to keep the green and silver of woods and rivers far from his thoughts; they were the mirrors in which his fancy saw itself. Professor Wilson, who had known him as a friend, writing of him in *Blackwood's* after his death, says: "Living for years in solitude, he unconsciously formed friendships with the springs, the brooks, the caves, the hills, and with all the more fleeting and faithless pageantry of the sky, that to him came in place of those human affections from whose indulgence he was debarred by the necessities that kept him aloof from the cottage fire and up among the mists of the mountain-top. The still green beauty of the pastoral hills and vales where he passed his youth inspired him with ever-brooding visions of fairyland, till, as he lay musing in his lonely shieling, the world of fantasy seemed, in the clear depths of his imagination, a lovelier reflection of that of nature, like the hills and heavens more softly shining in the water of his native lake."

His taste is often defective, as is that of Burns on occasions. This is a fault which might be expected in a man of his training; but the vigor and essential worth of the matters which he relates are beyond all question. He did not always know where to begin his short-story, or where to terminate. Some of his tales, if edited with blue-pencil erasures, would be found to contain a nucleus-technique which, though far from perfect, is more than equal to that of Washington Irving, who, like Apuleius, "cared not how he loitered by the way," and very superior to that of most of his immediate successors in the art. His story here in-

cluded, of *The Mysterious Bride*,[1] could scarcely be bettered in its method. To tell it in fewer words would be to obscure it; to tell it at greater length would be to rob it of its mystery and to make it obvious. Moreover, by employing atmosphere he tells it in such a way as to leave the reader with the impression that this occurrence, for all its magic, might not only be possible, but even probable—which achievement is the greatest triumph of the short-story writer's art.

As this history of the evolution of the English short-story commenced with a poet, Chaucer,[2] who wrote all save two of his short-stories in poetry, so it fittingly closes with a poet, the Ettrick Shepherd, who wrote most of his short-stories in prose. It remained for yet another poet, Edgar Allan Poe, who may never have heard the name or have read a line from the writings of James Hogg, to bring to perfection the task on which he had spent his labor.

[1] Compare with Kipling's treatment of a similar theme in *The Brushwood Boy*.

[2] The *Gesta Romanorum* was written in Latin.

II

THE APPARITION OF MRS. VEAL

BY

Daniel Defoe (1661–1731)

The Apparition of Mrs. Veal

Daniel Defoe (1661–1731)

THIS thing is so rare in all its circumstances, and on so good authority, that my reading and conversation have not given me anything like it. It is fit to gratify the most ingenious and serious inquirer. Mrs. Bargrave is the person to whom Mrs. Veal appeared after her death; she is my intimate friend. and I can avouch for her reputation for these fifteen or sixteen years, on my own knowledge; and I can confirm the good character she had from her youth to the time of my acquaintance. Though, since this relation, she is calumniated by some people that are friends to the brother of Mrs. Veal who appeared, who think the relation of this appearance to be a reflection, and endeavor what they can to blast Mrs. Bargrave's reputation and to laugh the story out of countenance. But by the circumstances thereof, and the cheerful disposition of Mrs. Bargrave, notwithstanding the ill usage of a very wicked husband, there is not yet the least sign of dejection in her face; nor did I ever hear her let fall a desponding or murmuring expression; nay, not when actually under her husband's barbarity, which I have been a witness to, and several other persons of undoubted reputation.

Now you must know Mrs. Veal was a maiden gentlewoman of about thirty years of age, and for some years past had been troubled with fits, which were perceived

coming on her by her going off from her discourse very abruptly to some impertinence. She was maintained by an only brother, and kept his house in Dover. She was a very pious woman, and her brother a very sober man to all appearance; but how he does all he can to null and quash the story. Mrs. Veal was intimately acquainted with Mrs. Bargrave from her childhood. Mrs. Veal's circumstances were then mean; her father did not take care of his children as he ought, so that they were exposed to hardships. And Mrs. Bargrave in those days had as unkind a father, though she wanted neither for food nor clothing; while Mrs. Veal wanted for both, insomuch that she would often say, "Mrs. Bargrave, you are not only the best, but the only friend I have in the world; and no circumstance of life shall over dissolve my friendship." They would often condole each other's adverse fortunes, and read together *Drelincourt upon Death*, and other good books; and so, like two Christian friends, they comforted each other under their sorrow.

Some time after, Mr. Veal's friends got him a place in the custom-house at Dover, which occasioned Mrs. Veal, by little and little, to fall off from her intimacy with Mrs. Bargrave, though there was never any such thing as a quarrel; but an indifferency came on by degrees, till at last Mrs. Bargrave had not seen her in two years and a half, though above a twelvemonth of the time Mrs. Bargrave hath been absent from Dover, and this last half-year has been in Canterbury about two months of the time, dwelling in a house of her own.

In this house, on the eighth of September, one thousand seven hundred and five, she was sitting alone in the forenoon, thinking over her unfortunate life, and arguing herself into a due resignation to Providence, though her condition seemed hard: "And," said she, "I have been

provided for hitherto, and doubt not but I shall be still, and am well satisfied that my afflictions shall end when it is most fit for me." And then took up her sewing work, which she had no sooner done but she hears a knocking at the door; she went to see who was there, and this proved to be Mrs. Veal, her old friend, who was in a riding-habit. At that moment of time the clock struck twelve at noon.

"Madam," says Mrs. Bargrave, "I am surprised to see you, you have been so long a stranger"; but told her she was glad to see her, and offered to salute her, which Mrs. Veal complied with, till their lips almost touched, and then Mrs. Veal drew her hand across her own eyes, and said, "I am not very well," and so waived it. She told Mrs. Bargrave she was going a journey, and had a great mind to see her first. "But," says Mrs. Bargrave, "how can you take a journey alone? I am amazed at it, because I know you have a fond brother." "Oh," says Mrs. Veal, "I gave my brother the slip, and came away, because I had so great a desire to see you before I took my journey." So Mrs. Bargrave went in with her into another room within the first, and Mrs. Veal sat her down in an elbow-chair, in which Mrs. Bargrave was sitting when she heard Mrs. Veal knock. "Then," says Mrs. Veal, "my dear friend, I am come to renew our old friendship again, and beg your pardon for my breach of it; and if you can forgive me, you are the best of women." "Oh," says Mrs. Bargrave, "do not mention such a thing; I have not had an uneasy thought about it." "What did you think of me?" says Mrs. Veal. Says Mrs. Bargrave, "I thought you were like the rest of the world, and that prosperity had made you forget yourself and me." Then Mrs. Veal reminded Mrs. Bargrave of the many friendly offices she did her in former days, and much of the conversation they had with each other in the times of their adversity; what

books they read, and what comfort in particular they received from Drelincourt's *Book of Death*, which was the best, she said, on the subject ever wrote. She also mentioned Doctor Sherlock, and two Dutch books, which were translated, wrote upon death, and several others. But Drelincourt, she said, had the clearest notions of death and of the future state of any who had handled that subject. Then she asked Mrs. Bargrave whether she had Drelincourt. She said, "Yes." Says Mrs. Veal, "Fetch it." And so Mrs. Bargrave goes up-stairs and brings it down. Says Mrs. Veal, "Dear Mrs. Bargrave, if the eyes of our faith were as open as the eyes of our body, we should see numbers of angels about us for our guard. The notions we have of Heaven now are nothing like what it is, as Drelincourt says; therefore be comforted under your afflictions, and believe that the Almighty has a particular regard to you, and that your afflictions are marks of God's favor; and when they have done the business they are sent for, they shall be removed from you. And believe me, my dear friend, believe what I say to you, one minute of future happiness will infinitely reward you for all your sufferings. For I can never believe" (and claps her hand upon her knee with great earnestness, which, indeed, ran through most of her discourse) "that ever God will suffer you to spend all your days in this afflicted state. But be assured that your afflictions shall leave you, or you them, in a short time." She spake in that pathetical and heavenly manner that Mrs. Bargrave wept several times, she was so deeply affected with it.

Then Mrs. Veal mentioned Doctor Kendrick's *Ascetic*, at the end of which he gives an account of the lives of the primitive Christians. Their pattern she recommended to our imitation, and said, "Their conversation was not like this of our age. For now," says she, "there is nothing but

vain, frothy discourse, which is far different from theirs. Theirs was to edification, and to build one another up in faith, so that they were not as we are, nor are we as they were. But," said she, "we ought to do as they did; there was a hearty friendship among them; but where is it now to be found?" Says Mrs. Bargrave, "It is hard indeed to find a true friend in these days." Says Mrs. Veal, "Mr. Norris has a fine copy of verses, called *Friendship in Perfection*, which I wonderfully admire. Have you seen the book?" says Mrs. Veal. "No," says Mrs. Bargrave, "but I have the verses of my own writing out." "Have you?" says Mrs. Veal; "then fetch them"; which she did from above stairs, and offered them to Mrs. Veal to read, who refused, and waived the thing, saying, "holding down her head would make it ache"; and then desiring Mrs. Bargrave to read them to her, which she did. As they were admiring *Friendship*, Mrs. Veal said, "Dear Mrs. Bargrave, I shall love you forever." In these verses there is twice used the word "Elysian." "Ah!" says Mrs. Veal, "these poets have such names for Heaven." She would often draw her hand across her own eyes, and say, "Mrs. Bargrave, do not you think I am mightily impaired by my fits?" "No," says Mrs. Bargrave; "I think you look as well as ever I knew you."

After this discourse, which the apparition put in much finer words than Mrs. Bargrave said she could pretend to, and as much more than she can remember—for it cannot be thought that an hour and three quarters' conversation could all be retained, though the main of it she thinks she does—she said to Mrs. Bargrave she would have her write a letter to her brother, and tell him she would have him give rings to such and such; and that there was a purse of gold in her cabinet, and that she would have two broad pieces given to her cousin Watson.

Talking at this rate, Mrs. Bargrave thought that a fit was coming upon her, and so placed herself on a chair just before her knees, to keep her from falling to the ground, if her fits should occasion it; for the elbow-chair, she thought, would keep her from falling on either side. And to divert Mrs. Veal, as she thought, took hold of her gown-sleeve several times, and commended it. Mrs. Veal told her it was a scoured silk, and newly made up. But, for all this, Mrs. Veal persisted in her request, and told Mrs. Bargrave she must not deny her. And she would have her tell her brother all their conversation when she had the opportunity. "Dear Mrs. Veal," says Mrs. Bargrave, "this seems so impertinent that I cannot tell how to comply with it; and what a mortifying story will our conversation be to a young gentleman. Why," says Mrs. Bargrave, "it is much better, methinks, to do it yourself." "No," says Mrs. Veal; "though it seems impertinent to you now, you will see more reasons for it hereafter." Mrs. Bargrave, then, to satisfy her importunity, was going to fetch a pen and ink, but Mrs. Veal said, "Let it alone now, but do it when I am gone; but you must be sure to do it"; which was one of the last things she enjoined her at parting, and so she promised her.

Then Mrs. Veal asked for Mrs. Bargrave's daughter. She said she was not at home. "But if you have a mind to see her," says Mrs. Bargrave, "I'll send for her." "Do," says Mrs. Veal; on which she left her, and went to a neighbor's to see her; and by the time Mrs. Bargrave was returning, Mrs. Veal was got without the door in the street, in the face of the beast-market, on a Saturday (which is market-day), and stood ready to part as soon as Mrs. Bargrave came to her. She asked her why she was in such haste. She said she must be going, though perhaps she might not go her journey till Monday; and told Mrs.

Bargrave she hoped she should see her again at her cousin Watson's before she went whither she was going. Then she said she would take her leave of her, and walked from Mrs. Bargrave, in her view, till a turning interrupted the sight of her, which was three-quarters after one in the afternoon.

Mrs. Veal died the seventh of September, at twelve o'clock at noon, of her fits, and had not above four hours' senses before her death, in which time she received the sacrament. The next day after Mrs. Veal's appearance, being Sunday, Mrs. Bargrave was mightily indisposed with a cold and sore throat, that she could not go out that day; but on Monday morning she sends a person to Captain Watson's to know if Mrs. Veal was there. They wondered at Mrs. Bargrave's inquiry, and sent her word she was not there, nor was expected. At this answer, Mrs. Bargrave told the maid she had certainly mistook the name or made some blunder. And though she was ill, she put on her hood and went herself to Captain Watson's, though she knew none of the family, to see if Mrs. Veal was there or not. They said they wondered at her asking, for that she had not been in town; they were sure, if she had, she would have been there. Says Mrs. Bargrave, "I am sure she was with me on Saturday almost two hours." They said it was impossible, for they must have seen her if she had. In comes Captain Watson, while they were in dispute, and said that Mrs. Veal was certainly dead, and the escutcheons were making. This strangely surprised Mrs. Bargrave, when she sent to the person immediately who had the care of them, and found it true. Then she related the whole story to Captain Watson's family; and what gown she had on, and how striped; and that Mrs. Veal told her that it was scoured. Then Mrs. Watson cried out, "You have seen her indeed, for none knew but Mrs. Veal and myself that

the gown was scoured." And Mrs. Watson owned that she described the gown exactly; "for," said she, "I helped her to make it up." This Mrs. Watson blazed all about the town, and avouched the demonstration of truth of Mrs. Bargrave's seeing Mrs. Veal's apparition. And Captain Watson carried two gentlemen immediately to Mrs. Bargrave's house to hear the relation from her own mouth. And when it spread so fast that gentlemen and persons of quality, the judicious and sceptical part of the world, flocked in upon her, it at last became such a task that she was forced to go out of the way; for they were in general extremely satisfied of the truth of the thing, and plainly saw that Mrs. Bargrave was no hypochondriac, for she always appears with such a cheerful air and pleasing mien that she has gained the favor and esteem of all the gentry, and it is thought a great favor if they can but get the relation from her own mouth. I should have told you before that Mrs. Veal told Mrs. Bargrave that her sister and brother-in-law were just come down from London to see her. Says Mrs. Bargrave, "How came you to order matters so strangely?" "It could not be helped," said Mrs. Veal. And her brother and sister did come to see her, and entered the town of Dover just as Mrs. Veal was expiring. Mrs. Bargrave asked her whether she would drink some tea. Says Mrs. Veal, "I do not care if I do; but I'll warrant you this mad fellow"—meaning Mrs. Bargrave's husband—"has broke all your trinkets." "But," says Mrs. Bargrave, "I'll get something to drink in for all that"; but Mrs. Veal waived it, and said, "It is no matter; let it alone"; and so it passed.

All the time I sat with Mrs. Bargrave, which was some hours, she recollected fresh sayings of Mrs. Veal. And one material thing more she told Mrs. Bargrave, that old Mr. Bretton allowed Mrs. Veal ten pounds a year, which

was a secret, and unknown to Mrs. Bargrave till Mrs. Veal told her.

Mrs. Bargrave never varies in her story, which puzzles those who doubt of the truth, or are unwilling to believe it. A servant in the neighbor's yard adjoining to Mrs. Bargrave's house heard her talking to somebody an hour of the time Mrs. Veal was with her. Mrs. Bargrave went out to her next neighbor's the very moment she parted with Mrs. Veal, and told her what ravishing conversation she had had with an old friend, and told the whole of it. Drelincourt's *Book of Death* is, since this happened, bought up strangely. And it is to be observed that, notwithstanding all the trouble and fatigue Mrs. Bargrave has undergone upon this account, she never took the value of a farthing, nor suffered her daughter to take anything of anybody, and therefore can have no interest in telling the story.

But Mr. Veal does what he can to stifle the matter, and said he would see Mrs. Bargrave; but yet it is certain matter of fact that he has been at Captain Watson's since the death of his sister, and yet never went near Mrs. Bargrave; and some of his friends report her to be a liar, and that she knew of Mr. Bretton's ten pounds a year. But the person who pretends to say so has the reputation to be a notorious liar among persons whom I know to be of undoubted credit. Now, Mr. Veal is more of a gentleman than to say she lies, but says a bad husband has crazed her; but she needs only present herself, and it will effectually confute that pretence. Mr. Veal says he asked his sister on her death-bed whether she had a mind to dispose of anything. And she said no. Now the things which Mrs. Veal's apparition would have disposed of were so trifling, and nothing of justice aimed at in the disposal, that the design of it appears to me to be only in order to

make Mrs. Bargrave satisfy the world of the reality thereof as to what she had seen and heard, and to secure her reputation among the reasonable and understanding part of mankind. And then, again, Mr. Veal owns that there was a purse of gold; but it was not found in her cabinet, but in a comb-box. This looks improbable; for that Mrs. Watson owned that Mrs. Veal was so very careful of the key of her cabinet that she would trust nobody with it; and if so, no doubt she would not trust her gold out of it. And Mrs. Veal's often drawing her hands over her eyes, and asking Mrs. Bargrave whether her fits had not impaired her, looks to me as if she did it on purpose to remind Mrs. Bargrave of her fits, to prepare her not to think it strange that she should put her upon writing to her brother, to dispose of rings and gold, which look so much like a dying person's request; and it took accordingly with Mrs. Bargrave as the effect of her fits coming upon her, and was one of the many instances of her wonderful love to her and care of her, that she should not be affrighted, which, indeed, appears in her whole management, particularly in her coming to her in the daytime, waiving the salutation, and when she was alone; and then the manner of her parting, to prevent a second attempt to salute her.

Now, why Mr. Veal should think this relation a reflection—as it is plain he does, by his endeavoring to stifle it—I cannot imagine; because the generality believe her to be a good spirit, her discourse was so heavenly. Her two great errands were, to comfort Mrs. Bargrave in her affliction, and to ask her forgiveness for her breach of friendship, and with a pious discourse to encourage her. So that, after all, to suppose that Mrs. Bargrave could hatch such an invention as this, from Friday noon to Saturday noon—supposing that she knew of Mrs. Veal's death the very first moment—without jumbling circumstances, and without

any interest, too, she must be more witty, fortunate, and wicked, too, than any indifferent person, I dare say, will allow. I asked Mrs. Bargrave several times if she was sure she felt the gown. She answered, modestly, "If my senses be to be relied on, I am sure of it." I asked her if she heard a sound when she clapped her hand upon her knee. She said she did not remember she did, but said she appeared to be as much a substance as I did who talked with her. "And I may," said she, "be as soon persuaded that your apparition is talking to me now as that I did not really see her; for I was under no manner of fear, and received her as a friend, and parted with her as such. I would not," says she, "give one farthing to make any one believe it; I have no interest in it; nothing but trouble is entailed upon me for a long time, for aught I know; and, had it not come to light by accident, it would never have been made public." But now she says she will make her own private use of it, and keep herself out of the way as much as she can; and so she has done since. She says she had a gentleman who came thirty miles to her to hear the relation; and that she had told it to a roomful of people at the time. Several particular gentlemen have had the story from Mrs. Bargrave's own mouth.

This thing has very much affected me, and I am as well satisfied as I am of the best-grounded matter of fact. And why we should dispute matter of fact, because we cannot solve things of which we can have no certain or demonstrative notions, seems strange to me; Mrs. Bargrave's authority and sincerity alone would have been undoubted in any other case.

III

THE MYSTERIOUS BRIDE

BY

James Hogg (1770–1835)

The Mysterious Bride[1]

James Hogg (1770–1835)

A GREAT number of people nowadays are beginning broadly to insinuate that there are no such things as ghosts, or spiritual beings visible to mortal sight. Even Sir Walter Scott is turned renegade, and, with his stories made up of half-and-half, like Nathaniel Gow's toddy, is trying to throw cold water on the most certain, though most impalpable, phenomena of human nature. The bodies are daft. Heaven mend their wits! Before they had ventured to assert such things, I wish they had been where I have often been; or, in particular, where the Laird of Birkendelly was on St. Lawrence's Eve, in the year 1777, and sundry times subsequent to that.

Be it known, then, to every reader of this relation of facts that happened in my own remembrance that the road from Birkendelly to the great muckle village of Balmawhapple (commonly called the muckle town, in opposition to the little town that stood on the other side of the burn)—that road, I say, lay between two thorn-hedges, so well kept by the Laird's hedger, so close, and so high, that a rabbit could not have escaped from the highway into any of the adjoining fields. Along this road was the Laird riding on the Eve of St. Lawrence, in a careless, indifferent manner, with his hat to one side, and his cane dancing a hornpipe before him. He was, moreover, chanting a song

[1] From *Tales and Sketches*, by the Ettrick Shepherd.

to himself, and I have heard people tell what song it was too. There was once a certain, or rather uncertain, bard, ycleped Robert Burns, who made a number of good songs; but this that the Laird sang was an amorous song of great antiquity, which, like all the said bard's best songs, was sung one hundred and fifty years before he was born. It began thus:

"I am the Laird of Windy-wa's,
I cam nae here without a cause,
An' I hae gotten forty fa's
In coming o'er the knowe, joe.
The night it is baith wind and weet;
The morn it will be snaw and sleet;
My shoon are frozen to my feet;
O, rise an' let me in, joe!
Let me in this ae night," etc.

This song was the Laird singing, while, at the same time, he was smudging and laughing at the catastrophe, when, ere ever aware, he beheld, a short way before him, an uncommonly elegant and beautiful girl walking in the same direction with him. "Aye," said the Laird to himself, "here is something very attractive indeed! Where the deuce can she have sprung from? She must have risen out of the earth, for I never saw her till this breath. Well, I declare I have not seen such a female figure—I wish I had such an assignation with her as the Laird of Windy-wa's had with his sweetheart."

As the Laird was half-thinking, half-speaking this to himself, the enchanting creature looked back at him with a motion of intelligence that she knew what he was half-saying, half-thinking, and then vanished over the summit of the rising ground before him, called the Birky Brow. "Aye, go your ways!" said the Laird; "I see by you, you'll not be very hard to overtake. You cannot get off the road,

and I'll have a chat with you before you make the Deer's Den."

The Laird jogged on. He did not sing the *Laird of Windy-wa's* any more, for he felt a stifling about his heart; but he often repeated to himself, "She's a very fine woman!—a very fine woman indeed!—and to be walking here by herself! I cannot comprehend it."

When he reached the summit of the Birky Brow he did not see her, although he had a longer view of the road than before. He thought this very singular, and began to suspect that she wanted to escape him, although apparently rather lingering on him before. "I shall have another look at her, however," thought the Laird, and off he set at a flying trot. No. He came first to one turn, then another. There was nothing of the young lady to be seen. "Unless she take wings and fly away, I shall be up with her," quoth the Laird, and off he set at the full gallop.

In the middle of his career he met with Mr. M'Murdie, of Aulton, who hailed him with, "Hilloa, Birkendelly! Where the deuce are you flying at that rate?"

"I was riding after a woman," said the Laird, with great simplicity, reining in his steed.

"Then I am sure no woman on earth can long escape you, unless she be in an air balloon."

"I don't know that. Is she far gone?"

"In which way do you mean?"

"In this."

"Aha-ha-ha! Hee-hee-hee!" nichered M'Murdie, misconstruing the Laird's meaning.

"What do you laugh at, my dear sir? Do you know her, then?"

"Ho-ho-ho! Hee-hee-hee! How should I, or how can I, know her, Birkendelly, unless you inform me who she is?"

"Why, that is the very thing I want to know of you. I mean the young lady whom you met just now."

"You are raving, Birkendelly. I met no young lady, nor is there a single person on the road I have come by, while you know that for a mile and a half forward your way she could not get out of it."

"I know that," said the Laird, biting his lip and looking greatly puzzled; "but confound me if I understand this; for I was within speech of her just now on the top of the Birky Brow there, and, when I think of it, she could not have been even thus far as yet. She had on a pure white gauze frock, a small green bonnet and feathers, and a green veil, which, flung back over her left shoulder, hung below her waist, and was altogether such an engaging figure that no man could have passed her on the road without taking some note of her. Are you not making game of me? Did you not really meet with her?"

"On my word of truth and honor, I did not. Come, ride back with me, and we shall meet her still, depend on it. She has given you the go-by on the road. Let us go; I am only to call at the mill about some barley for the distillery, and will return with you to the big town."

Birkendelly returned with his friend. The sun was not yet set, yet M'Murdie could not help observing that the Laird looked thoughtful and confused, and not a word could he speak about anything save this lovely apparition with the white frock and the green veil; and lo! when they reached the top of Birky Brow there was the maiden again before them, and exactly at the same spot where the Laird first saw her before, only walking in the contrary direction.

"Well, this is the most extraordinary thing that I ever knew!" exclaimed the Laird.

"What is it, sir?" said M'Murdie.

"How that young lady could have eluded me," returned the Laird. "See, here she is still!"

"I beg your pardon, sir, I don't see her. Where is she?"

"There, on the other side of the angle; but you are short-sighted. See, there she is ascending the other eminence in her white frock and green veil, as I told you. What a lovely creature!"

"Well, well, we have her fairly before us now, and shall see what she is like at all events," said M'Murdie.

Between the Birky Brow and this other slight eminence there is an obtuse angle of the road at the part where it is lowest, and, in passing this, the two friends necessarily lost sight of the object of their curiosity. They pushed on at a quick pace, cleared the low angle—the maiden was not there! They rode full speed to the top of the eminence from whence a long extent of road was visible before them—there was no human creature in view. M'Murdie laughed aloud, but the Laird turned pale as death and bit his lip. His friend asked him good-humoredly why he was so much affected. He said, because he could not comprehend the meaning of this singular apparition or illusion, and it troubled him the more as he now remembered a dream of the same nature which he had, and which terminated in a dreadful manner.

"Why, man, you are dreaming still," said M'Murdie. "But never mind; it is quite common for men of your complexion to dream of beautiful maidens with white frocks, and green veils, bonnets, feathers, and slender waists. It is a lovely image, the creation of your own sanguine imagination, and you may worship it without any blame. Were her shoes black or green? And her stockings—did you note them? The symmetry of the limbs, I am sure you did! Good-bye; I see you are not

disposed to leave the spot. Perhaps she will appear to you again."

So saying, M'Murdie rode on toward the mill, and Birkendelly, after musing for some time, turned his beast's head slowly round, and began to move toward the great muckle village.

The Laird's feelings were now in terrible commotion. He was taken beyond measure with the beauty and elegance of the figure he had seen, but he remembered, with a mixture of admiration and horror, that a dream of the same enchanting object had haunted his slumbers all the days of his life; yet, how singular that he should never have recollected the circumstance till now! But farther, with the dream there were connected some painful circumstances which, though terrible in their issue, he could not recollect so as to form them into any degree of arrangement.

As he was considering deeply of these things and riding slowly down the declivity, neither dancing his cane nor singing the *Laird of Windy-wa's*, he lifted up his eyes, and there was the girl on the same spot where he saw her first, walking deliberately up the Birky Brow. The sun was down, but it was the month of August and a fine evening, and the Laird, seized with an unconquerable desire to see and speak with that incomparable creature, could restrain himself no longer, but shouted out to her to stop till he came up. She beckoned acquiescence, and slackened her pace into a slow movement. The Laird turned the corner quickly, but when he had rounded it the maiden was still there, though on the summit of the brow. She turned round, and, with an ineffable smile and curtsy, saluted him, and again moved slowly on. She vanished gradually beyond the summit, and while the green feathers were still nodding in view, and so nigh that the Laird could have touched them with a fishing-rod, he reached the top of

the brow himself. There was no living soul there, nor onward, as far as his view reached. He now trembled in every limb, and, without knowing what he did, rode straight on to the big town, not daring well to return and see what he had seen for three several times; and certain he would see it again when the shades of evening were deepening, he deemed it proper and prudent to decline the pursuit of such a phantom any farther.

He alighted at the Queen's Head, called for some brandy and water, quite forgot what was his errand to the great muckle town that afternoon, there being nothing visible to his mental sight but lovely images, with white gauze frocks and green veils. His friend M'Murdie joined him; they drank deep, bantered, reasoned, got angry, reasoned themselves calm again, and still all would not do. The Laird was conscious that he had seen the beautiful apparition, and, moreover, that she was the very maiden, or the resemblance of her, who, in the irrevocable decrees of Providence, was destined to be his. It was in vain that M'Murdie reasoned of impressions on the imagination, and

> "Of fancy moulding in the mind,
> Light visions on the passing wind."

Vain also was a story that he told him of a relation of his own, who was greatly harassed by the apparition of an officer in a red uniform that haunted him day and night, and had very nigh put him quite distracted several times, till at length his physician found out the nature of this illusion so well that he knew, from the state of his pulse, to an hour when the ghost of the officer would appear, and by bleeding, low diet, and emollients contrived to keep the apparition away altogether.

The Laird admitted the singularity of this incident, but not that it was one in point; for the one, he said, was

imaginary, the other real, and that no conclusions could convince him in opposition to the authority of his own senses. He accepted of an invitation to spend a few days with M'Murdie and his family, but they all acknowledged afterward that the Laird was very much like one bewitched.

As soon as he reached home he went straight to the Birky Brow, certain of seeing once more the angelic phantom, but she was not there. He took each of his former positions again and again, but the desired vision would in no wise make its appearance. He tried every day and every hour of the day, all with the same effect, till he grew absolutely desperate, and had the audacity to kneel on the spot and entreat of Heaven to see her. Yes, he called on Heaven to see her once more, whatever she was, whether a being of earth, heaven, or hell.

He was now in such a state of excitement that he could not exist; he grew listless, impatient, and sickly, took to his bed, and sent for M'Murdie and the doctor; and the issue of the consultation was that Birkendelly consented to leave the country for a season, on a visit to his only sister in Ireland, whither we must accompany him for a short space.

His sister was married to Captain Bryan, younger, of Scoresby, and they two lived in a cottage on the estate, and the Captain's parents and sisters at Scoresby Hall. Great was the stir and preparation when the gallant young Laird of Birkendelly arrived at the cottage, it never being doubted that he came to forward a second bond of connection with the family, which still contained seven dashing sisters, all unmarried, and all alike willing to change that solitary and helpless state for the envied one of matrimony—a state highly popular among the young women of Ireland. Some of the Misses Bryan had now

reached the years of womanhood, several of them scarcely, but these small disqualifications made no difference in the estimation of the young ladies themselves; each and all of them brushed up for the competition with high hopes and unflinching resolutions. True, the elder ones tried to check the younger in their good-natured, forthright Irish way; but they retorted, and persisted in their superior pretensions. Then there was such shopping in the county town! It was so boundless that the credit of the Hall was finally exhausted, and the old Squire was driven to remark that "Och, and to be sure it was a dreadful and tirrabell concussion, to be put upon the equipment of seven daughters all at the same moment, as if the young gentleman could marry them all! Och, then, poor dear shoul, he would be after finding that one was sufficient, if not one too many. And therefore there was no occasion, none at all, at all, and that there was not, for any of them to rig out more than one."

It was hinted that the Laird had some reason for complaint at this time, but as the lady sided with her daughters, he had no chance. One of the items of his account was thirty-seven buckling-combs, then greatly in vogue. There were black combs, pale combs, yellow combs, and gilt ones, all to suit or set off various complexions; and if other articles bore any proportion at all to these, it had been better for the Laird and all his family that Birkendelly had never set foot in Ireland.

The plan was all concocted. There was to be a grand dinner at the Hall, at which the damsels were to appear in all their finery. A ball to follow, and note be taken which of the young ladies was their guest's choice, and measures taken accordingly. The dinner and the ball took place; and what a pity I may not describe that entertainment, the dresses, and the dancers, for they were all exquisite in

their way, and *outré* beyond measure. But such details only serve to derange a winter evening's tale such as this.

Birkendelly having at this time but one model for his choice among womankind, all that ever he did while in the presence of ladies was to look out for some resemblance to her, the angel of his fancy; and it so happened that in one of old Bryan's daughters named Luna, or, more familiarly, Loony, he perceived, or thought he perceived, some imaginary similarity in form and air to the lovely apparition. This was the sole reason why he was incapable of taking his eyes off from her the whole of that night; and this incident settled the point, not only with the old people, but even the young ladies were forced, after every exertion on their own parts, to "yild the p'int to their sister Loony, who certainly was not the mist genteelest nor mist handsomest of that guid-lucking fimily."

The next day Lady Luna was dispatched off to the cottage in grand style, there to live hand in glove with her supposed lover. There was no standing all this. There were the two parrocked together, like a ewe and a lamb, early and late; and though the Laird really appeared to have, and probably had, some delight in her company, it was only in contemplating that certain indefinable air of resemblance which she bore to the sole image impressed on his heart. He bought her a white gauze frock, a green bonnet and feather, with a veil, which she was obliged to wear thrown over her left shoulder, and every day after, six times a day, was she obliged to walk over a certain eminence at a certain distance before her lover. She was delighted to oblige him; but still, when he came up, he looked disappointed, and never said, "Luna, I love you; when are we to be married?" No, he never said any such thing, for all her looks and expressions of fondest love; for, alas! in all this dalliance he was only feeding a mysterious flame that

preyed upon his vitals, and proved too severe for the powers either of reason or religion to extinguish. Still, time flew lighter and lighter by, his health was restored, the bloom of his cheek returned, and the frank and simple confidence of Luna had a certain charm with it that reconciled him to his sister's Irish economy. But a strange incident now happened to him which deranged all his immediate plans.

He was returning from angling one evening, a little before sunset, when he saw Lady Luna awaiting him on his way home. But instead of brushing up to meet him as usual, she turned, and walked up the rising ground before him. "Poor sweet girl! how condescending she is," said he to himself, "and how like she is in reality to the angelic being whose form and features are so deeply impressed on my heart! I now see it is no fond or fancied resemblance. It is real! real! real! How I long to clasp her in my arms, and tell her how I love her; for, after all, that is the girl that is to be mine, and the former a vision to impress this the more on my heart."

He posted up the ascent to overtake her. When at the top she turned, smiled, and curtsied. Good heavens! it was the identical lady of his fondest adoration herself, but lovelier, far lovelier, than ever. He expected every moment that she would vanish, as was her wont; but she did not—she awaited him, and received his embraces with open arms. She was a being of real flesh and blood, courteous, elegant, and affectionate. He kissed her hand, he kissed her glowing cheek, and blessed all the powers of love who had thus restored her to him again, after undergoing pangs of love such as man never suffered.

"But, dearest heart, here we are standing in the middle of the highway," said he; "suffer me to conduct you to my sister's house, where you shall have an apartment with

a child of nature having some slight resemblance to yourself." She smiled, and said, "No, I will not sleep with Lady Luna to-night. Will you please to look round you, and see where you are." He did so, and behold they were standing on the Birky Brow, on the only spot where he had ever seen her. She smiled at his embarrassed look, and asked if he did not remember aught of his coming over from Ireland. He said he thought he did remember something of it, but love with him had long absorbed every other sense. He then asked her to his own house, which she declined, saying she could only meet him on that spot till after their marriage, which could not be before St. Lawrence's Eve come three years. "And now," said she, "we must part. My name is Jane Ogilvie, and you were betrothed to me before you were born. But I am come to release you this evening, if you have the slightest objection."

He declared he had none; and kneeling, swore the most solemn oath to be hers forever, and to meet her there on St. Lawrence's Eve next, and every St. Lawrence's Eve until that blessed day on which she had consented to make him happy by becoming his own forever. She then asked him affectionately to change rings with her, in pledge of their faith and troth, in which he joyfully acquiesced; for she could not have then asked any conditions which, in the fulness of his heart's love, he would not have granted; and after one fond and affectionate kiss, and repeating all their engagements over again, they parted.

Birkendelly's heart was now melted within him, and all his senses overpowered by one overwhelming passion. On leaving his fair and kind one, he got bewildered, and could not find the road to his own house, believing sometimes that he was going there, and sometimes to his sister's, till at length he came, as he thought, upon the

Liffey, at its junction with Loch Allan; and there, in attempting to call for a boat, he awoke from a profound sleep, and found himself lying in his bed within his sister's house, and the day sky just breaking.

If he was puzzled to account for some things in the course of his dream, he was much more puzzled to account for them now that he was wide awake. He was sensible that he had met his love, had embraced, kissed, and exchanged vows and rings with her, and, in token of the truth and reality of all these, her emerald ring was on his finger, and his own away; so there was no doubt that they had met—by what means it was beyond the power of man to calculate.

There was then living with Mrs. Bryan an old Scotswoman, commonly styled Lucky Black. She had nursed Birkendelly's mother, and been dry-nurse to himself and sister; and having more than a mother's attachment for the latter, when she was married, old Lucky left her country to spend the last of her days in the house of her beloved young lady. When the Laird entered the breakfast-parlor that morning she was sitting in her black velvet hood, as usual, reading *The Fourfold State of Man*, and, being paralytic and somewhat deaf, she seldom regarded those who went or came. But chancing to hear him say something about the 9th of August, she quitted reading, turned round her head to listen, and then asked, in a hoarse, tremulous voice: "What's that he's saying? What's the unlucky callant saying about the 9th of August? Aih? To be sure it is St. Lawrence's Eve, although the 10th be his day. It's ower true, ower true, ower true for him an' a' his kin, poor man! Aih? What was he saying then?"

The men smiled at her incoherent earnestness, but the lady, with true feminine condescension, informed her, in

a loud voice, that Allan had an engagement in Scotland on St. Lawrence's Eve. She then started up, extended her shrivelled hands, that shook like the aspen, and panted out: "Aih, aih? Lord preserve us! Whaten an engagement has he on St. Lawrence's Eve? Bind him! bind him! Shackle him wi' bands of steel, and of brass, and of iron! O may He whose blessed will was pleased to leave him an orphan sae soon, preserve him from the fate which I tremble to think on!"

She then tottered round the table, as with supernatural energy, and seizing the Laird's right hand, she drew it close to her unstable eyes, and then perceiving the emerald ring chased in blood, she threw up her arms with a jerk, opened her skinny jaws with a fearful gape, and uttering a shriek that made all the house yell, and every one within it to tremble, she fell back lifeless and rigid on the floor. The gentlemen both fled, out of sheer terror; but a woman never deserts her friends in extremity. The lady called her maids about her, had her old nurse conveyed to bed, where every means were used to restore animation. But, alas, life was extinct! The vital spark had fled forever, which filled all their hearts with grief, disappointment, and horror, as some dreadful tale of mystery was now sealed up from their knowledge which, in all likelihood, no other could reveal. But to say the truth, the Laird did not seem greatly disposed to probe it to the bottom.

Not all the arguments of Captain Bryan and his lady, nor the simple entreaties of Lady Luna, could induce Birkendelly to put off his engagement to meet his love on the Birky Brow on the evening of the 9th of August; but he promised soon to return, pretending that some business of the utmost importance called him away. Before he went, however, he asked his sister if ever she had heard of such a lady in Scotland as Jane Ogilvie.

Mrs. Bryan repeated the name many times to herself, and said that name undoubtedly was once familiar to her, although she thought not for good, but at that moment she did not recollect one single individual of the name. He then showed her the emerald ring that had been the death of Lucky Black; but the moment the lady looked at it, she made a grasp at it to take it off by force, which she had very nearly effected. "Oh, burn it! burn it!" cried she; "it is not a right ring! Burn it!"

"My dear sister, what fault is in the ring?" said he. "It is a very pretty ring, and one that I set great value by."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, burn it, and renounce the giver!" cried she. "If you have any regard for your peace here or your soul's welfare hereafter, burn that ring! If you saw with your own eyes, you would easily perceive that that is not a ring befitting a Christian to wear."

This speech confounded Birkendelly a good deal. He retired by himself and examined the ring, and could see nothing in it unbecoming a Christian to wear. It was a chased gold ring, with a bright emerald, which last had a red foil, in some lights giving it a purple gleam, and inside was engraven "*Elegit*," much defaced, but that his sister could not see; therefore he could not comprehend her vehement injunctions concerning it. But that it might no more give her offence, or any other, he sewed it within his vest, opposite his heart, judging that there was something in it which his eyes were withholden from discerning.

Thus he left Ireland with his mind in great confusion, groping his way, as it were, in a hole of mystery, yet with the passion that preyed on his heart and vitals more intense than ever. He seems to have had an impression all his life that some mysterious fate awaited him, which the correspondence of his dreams and day visions tended to

confirm. And though he gave himself wholly up to the sway of one overpowering passion, it was not without some yearnings of soul, manifestations of terror, and so much earthly shame, that he never more mentioned his love, or his engagements, to any human being, not even to his friend M'Murdie, whose company he forthwith shunned.

It is on this account that I am unable to relate what passed between the lovers thenceforward. It is certain they met at the Birky Brow that St. Lawrence's Eve, for they were seen in company together; but of the engagements, vows, or dalliance that passed between them I can say nothing; nor of all their future meetings, until the beginning of August, 1781, when the Laird began decidedly to make preparations for his approaching marriage; yet not as if he and his betrothed had been to reside at Birkendelly, all his provisions rather bespeaking a meditated journey.

On the morning of the 9th he wrote to his sister, and then arraying himself in his new wedding suit, and putting the emerald ring on his finger, he appeared all impatience, until toward evening, when he sallied out on horseback to his appointment. It seems that his mysterious inamorata had met him, for he was seen riding through the big town before sunset, with a young lady behind him, dressed in white and green, and the villagers affirmed that they were riding at the rate of fifty miles an hour! They were seen to pass a cottage called Mosskilt, ten miles farther on, where there was no highway, at the same tremendous speed; and I could never hear that they were any more seen, until the following morning, when Birkendelly's fine bay horse was found lying dead at his own stable door; and shortly after his master was likewise discovered lying, a blackened corpse, on the Birky Brow at the very spot where the mysterious but lovely dame had always appeared to him. There was

neither wound, bruise, nor dislocation in his whole frame; but his skin was of a livid color, and his features terribly distorted.

This woful catastrophe struck the neighborhood with great consternation, so that nothing else was talked of. Every ancient tradition and modern incident were raked together, compared, and combined; and certainly a most rare concatenation of misfortunes was elicited. It was authenticated that his father had died on the same spot that day twenty years, and his grandfather that day forty years, the former, as was supposed, by a fall from his horse when in liquor, and the latter, nobody knew how; and now this Allan was the last of his race, for Mrs. Bryan had no children.

It was, moreover, now remembered by many, and among the rest by the Rev. Joseph Taylor, that he had frequently observed a young lady, in white and green, sauntering about the spot on a St. Lawrence's Eve.

When Captain Bryan and his lady arrived to take possession of the premises, they instituted a strict inquiry into every circumstance; but nothing further than what was related to them by Mr. M'Murdie could be learned of this Mysterious Bride, besides what the Laird's own letter bore. It ran thus:

"Dearest Sister,—I shall before this time to-morrow be the most happy, or most miserable, of mankind, having solemnly engaged myself this night to wed a young and beautiful lady, named Jane Ogilvie, to whom it seems I was betrothed before I was born. Our correspondence has been of a most private and mysterious nature; but my troth is pledged, and my resolution fixed. We set out on a far journey to the place of her abode on the nuptial eve, so that it will be long before I see you again. Yours till death,

"Allan George Sandison.

"Birkendelly, *August* 8, 1781."

That very same year, an old woman, named Marion Haw, was returned upon that, her native parish, from Glasgow. She had led a migratory life with her son—who was what he called a bell-hanger, but in fact a tinker of the worst grade—for many years, and was at last returned to the muckle town in a state of great destitution. She gave the parishioners a history of the Mysterious Bride, so plausibly correct, but withal so romantic, that everybody said of it (as is often said of my narratives, with the same narrow-minded prejudice and injustice) that it was a *made story*. There were, however, some strong testimonies of its veracity.

She said the first Allan Sandison, who married the great heiress of Birkendelly, was previously engaged to a beautiful young lady named Jane Ogilvie, to whom he gave anything but fair play; and, as she believed, either murdered her, or caused her to be murdered, in the midst of a thicket of birch and broom, at a spot which she mentioned; and she had good reason for believing so, as she had seen the red blood and the new grave, when she was a little girl, and ran home and mentioned it to her grandfather, who charged her as she valued her life never to mention that again, as it was only the nombles and hide of a deer which he himself had buried there. But when, twenty years subsequent to that, the wicked and unhappy Allan Sandison was found dead on that very spot, and lying across the green mound, then nearly level with the surface, which she had once seen a new grave, she then for the first time ever thought of a Divine Providence; and she added, "For my grandfather, Neddy Haw, he dee'd too; there's naebody kens how, nor ever shall."

As they were quite incapable of conceiving from Marion's description anything of the spot, Mr. M'Murdie caused her to be taken out to the Birky Brow in a cart, accompanied

by Mr. Taylor and some hundreds of the town's folks; but whenever she saw it, she said, "Aha, birkies! the haill kintra's altered now. There was nae road here then; it gaed straight ower the tap o' the hill. An' let me see—there's the thorn where the cushats biggit; an' there's the auld birk that I ance fell aff an' left my shoe sticking i' the cleft. I can tell ye, birkies, either the deer's grave or bonny Jane Ogilvie's is no twa yards aff the place where that horse's hind-feet are standin'; sae ye may howk, an' see if there be ony remains."

The minister and M'Murdie and all the people stared at one another, for they had purposely caused the horse to stand still on the very spot where both the father and son had been found dead. They digged, and deep, deep below the road they found part of the slender bones and skull of a young female, which they deposited decently in the church-yard. The family of the Sandisons is extinct, the Mysterious Bride appears no more on the Eve of St Lawrence, and the wicked people of the great muckle village have got a lesson on divine justice written to them in lines of blood.

IV

THE DEVIL AND TOM WALKER

BY

Washington Irving (1783–1859)

The Devil and Tom Walker[1]

Washington Irving (1783–1859)

A FEW miles from Boston, in Massachusetts, there is a deep inlet winding several miles into the interior of the country from Charles Bay, and terminating in a thickly wooded swamp or morass. On one side of this inlet is a beautiful dark grove; on the opposite side the land rises abruptly from the water's edge into a high ridge, on which grow a few scattered oaks of great age and immense size. Under one of these gigantic trees, according to old stories, there was a great amount of treasure buried by Kidd the pirate. The inlet allowed a facility to bring the money in a boat secretly, and at night, to the very foot of the hill; the elevation of the place permitted a good lookout to be kept that no one was at hand; while the remarkable trees formed good landmarks by which the place might easily be found again. The old stories add, moreover, that the devil presided at the hiding of the money, and took it under his guardianship; but this, it is well known, he always does with buried treasure, particularly when it has been ill-gotten. Be that as it may, Kidd never returned to recover his wealth; being shortly after seized at Boston, sent out to England, and there hanged for a pirate.

About the year 1727, just at the time that earthquakes

[1] From *The Money-diggers.*

were prevalent in New England, and shook many tall sinners down upon their knees, there lived near this place a meagre, miserly fellow, of the name of Tom Walker. He had a wife as miserly as himself; they were so miserly that they even conspired to cheat each other. Whatever the woman could lay hands on she hid away; a hen could not cackle but she was on the alert to secure the new-laid egg. Her husband was continually prying about to detect her secret hoards, and many and fierce were the conflicts that took place about what ought to have been common property. They lived in a forlorn-looking house that stood alone and had an air of starvation. A few straggling savin-trees, emblems of sterility, grew near it; no smoke ever curled from its chimney; no traveller stopped at its door. A miserable horse, whose ribs were as articulate as the bars of a gridiron, stalked about a field, where a thin carpet of moss, scarcely covering the ragged beds of pudding-stone, tantalized and balked his hunger; and sometimes he would lean his head over the fence, look piteously at the passer-by, and seem to petition deliverance from this land of famine.

The house and its inmates had altogether a bad name. Tom's wife was a tall termagant, fierce of temper, loud of tongue, and strong of arm. Her voice was often heard in wordy warfare with her husband; and his face sometimes showed signs that their conflicts were not confined to words. No one ventured, however, to interfere between them. The lonely wayfarer shrank within himself at the horrid clamor and clapper-clawing; eyed the den of discord askance; and hurried on his way, rejoicing, if a bachelor, in his celibacy.

One day that Tom Walker had been to a distant part of the neighborhood, he took what he considered a short-cut homeward, through the swamp. Like most short-cuts,

it was an ill-chosen route. The swamp was thickly grown with great, gloomy pines and hemlocks, some of them ninety feet high, which made it dark at noonday and a retreat for all the owls of the neighborhood. It was full of pits and quagmires, partly covered with weeds and mosses, where the green surface often betrayed the traveller into a gulf of black, smothering mud; there were also dark and stagnant pools, the abodes of the tadpole, the bull-frog, and the water-snake, where the trunks of pines and hemlocks lay half-drowned, half-rotting, looking like alligators sleeping in the mire.

Tom had long been picking his way cautiously through this treacherous forest, stepping from tuft to tuft of rushes and roots, which afforded precarious footholds among deep sloughs, or pacing carefully, like a cat, along the prostrate trunks of trees, startled now and then by the sudden screaming of the bittern, or the quacking of a wild duck, rising on the wing from some solitary pool. At length he arrived at a firm piece of ground, which ran like a peninsula into the deep bosom of the swamp. It had been one of the strongholds of the Indians during their wars with the first colonists. Here they had thrown up a kind of fort, which they had looked upon as almost impregnable, and had used as a place of refuge for their squaws and children. Nothing remained of the old Indian fort but a few embankments, gradually sinking to the level of the surrounding earth, and already overgrown in part by oaks and other forest trees, the foliage of which formed a contrast to the dark pines and hemlocks of the swamps.

It was late in the dusk of evening when Tom Walker reached the old fort, and he paused there awhile to rest himself. Any one but he would have felt unwilling to linger in this lonely, melancholy place, for the common people had a bad opinion of it, from the stories handed

down from the times of the Indian wars, when it was asserted that the savages held incantations here and made sacrifices to the Evil Spirit.

Tom Walker, however, was not a man to be troubled with any fears of the kind. He reposed himself for some time on the trunk of a fallen hemlock, listening to the boding cry of the tree-toad, and delving with his walking-staff into a mound of black mould at his feet. As he turned up the soil unconsciously, his staff struck against something hard. He raked it out of the vegetable mould, and lo! a cloven skull, with an Indian tomahawk buried deep in it, lay before him. The rust on the weapon showed the time that had elapsed since this death-blow had been given. It was a dreary memento of the fierce struggle that had taken place in this last foothold of the Indian warriors.

"Humph!" said Tom Walker, as he gave it a kick to shake the dirt from it.

"Let that skull alone!" said a gruff voice. Tom lifted up his eyes and beheld a great black man seated directly opposite him, on the stump of a tree. He was exceedingly surprised, having neither heard nor seen any one approach; and he was still more perplexed on observing, as well as the gathering gloom would permit, that the stranger was neither negro nor Indian. It is true he was dressed in a rude Indian garb, and had a red belt or sash swathed round his body; but his face was neither black nor copper-color, but swarthy and dingy, and begrimed with soot, as if he had been accustomed to toil among fires and forges. He had a shock of coarse black hair, that stood out from his head in all directions, and bore an axe on his shoulder.

He scowled for a moment at Tom with a pair of great red eyes.

"What are you doing on my grounds?" said the black man, with a hoarse, growling voice.

"Your grounds!" said Tom, with a sneer; "no more your grounds than mine; they belong to Deacon Peabody."

"Deacon Peabody be damned," said the stranger, "as I flatter myself he will be, if he does not look more to his own sins and less to those of his neighbors. Look yonder, and see how Deacon Peabody is faring."

Tom looked in the direction that the stranger pointed, and beheld one of the great trees, fair and flourishing without, but rotten at the core, and saw that it had been nearly hewn through, so that the first high wind was likely to blow it down. On the bark of the tree was scored the name of Deacon Peabody, an eminent man who had waxed wealthy by driving shrewd bargains with the Indians. He now looked around, and found most of the tall trees marked with the name of some great man of the colony, and all more or less scored by the axe. The one on which he had been seated, and which had evidently just been hewn down, bore the name of Crowninshield; and he recollected a mighty rich man of that name, who made a vulgar display of wealth, which it was whispered he had acquired by buccaneering.

"He's just ready for burning!" said the black man, with a growl of triumph. "You see I am likely to have a good stock of firewood for winter."

"But what right have you," said Tom, "to cut down Deacon Peabody's timber?"

"The right of a prior claim," said the other. "This woodland belonged to me long before one of your white-faced race put foot upon the soil."

"And, pray, who are you, if I may be so bold?" said Tom.

"Oh, I go by various names. I am the wild huntsman

in some countries; the black miner in others. In this neighborhood I am known by the name of the black woodsman. I am he to whom the red men consecrated this spot, and in honor of whom they now and then roasted a white man, by way of sweet-smelling sacrifice. Since the red men have been exterminated by you white savages, I amuse myself by presiding at the persecutions of Quakers and Anabaptists; I am the great patron and prompter of slave-dealers and the grand-master of the Salem witches."

"The upshot of all which is, that, if I mistake not," said Tom, sturdily, "you are he commonly called Old Scratch."

"The same, at your service!" replied the black man, with a half-civil nod.

Such was the opening of this interview, according to the old story; though it has almost too familiar an air to be credited. One would think that to meet with such a singular personage in this wild, lonely place would have shaken any man's nerves; but Tom was a hard-minded fellow, not easily daunted, and he had lived so long with a termagant wife that he did not even fear the devil.

It is said that after this commencement they had a long and earnest conversation together, as Tom returned homeward. The black man told him of great sums of money buried by Kidd the pirate under the oak-trees on the high ridge, not far from the morass. All these were under his command, and protected by his power, so that none could find them but such as propitiated his favor. These he offered to place within Tom Walker's reach, having conceived an especial kindness for him; but they were to be had only on certain conditions. What these conditions were may be easily surmised, though Tom never disclosed them publicly. They must have been very hard, for he required time to think of them, and he was not a man to stick at trifles when money was in view. When they had reached

the edge of the swamp, the stranger paused. "What proof have I that all you have been telling me is true?" said Tom. "There's my signature," said the black man, pressing his finger on Tom's forehead. So saying, he turned off among the thickets of the swamp, and seemed, as Tom said, to go down, down, down, into the earth, until nothing but his head and shoulders could be seen, and so on, until he totally disappeared.

When Tom reached home he found the black print of a finger burned, as it were, into his forehead, which nothing could obliterate.

The first news his wife had to tell him was the sudden death of Absalom Crowninshield, the rich buccaneer. It was announced in the papers, with the usual flourish, that "A great man had fallen in Israel."

Tom recollected the tree which his black friend had just hewn down, and which was ready for burning. "Let the freebooter roast," said Tom; "who cares!" He now felt convinced that all he had heard and seen was no illusion.

He was not prone to let his wife into his confidence; but as this was an uneasy secret, he willingly shared it with her. All her avarice was awakened at the mention of hidden gold, and she urged her husband to comply with the black man's terms, and secure what would make them wealthy for life. However Tom might have felt disposed to sell himself to the devil, he was determined not to do so to oblige his wife; so he flatly refused, out of the mere spirit of contradiction. Many and bitter were the quarrels they had on the subject; but the more she talked, the more resolute was Tom not to be damned to please her.

At length she determined to drive the bargain on her own account, and, if she succeeded, to keep all the gain to herself. Being of the same fearless temper as her husband, she set off for the old Indian fort toward the close

of a summer's day. She was many hours absent. When she came back, she was reserved and sullen in her replies. She spoke something of a black man, whom she had met about twilight hewing at the root of a tall tree. He was sulky, however, and would not come to terms; she was to go again with a propitiatory offering, but what it was she forbore to say.

The next evening she set off again for the swamp, with her apron heavily laden. Tom waited and waited for her, but in vain; midnight came, but she did not make her appearance; morning, noon, night returned, but still she did not come. Tom now grew uneasy for her safety, especially as he found she had carried off in her apron the silver tea-pot and spoons, and every portable article of value. Another night elapsed, another morning came; but no wife. In a word, she was never heard of more.

What was her real fate nobody knows, in consequence of so many pretending to know. It is one of those facts which have become confounded by a variety of historians. Some asserted that she lost her way among the tangled mazes of the swamp, and sank into some pit or slough; others, more uncharitable, hinted that she had eloped with the household booty, and made off to some other province; while others surmised that the tempter had decoyed her into a dismal quagmire, on the top of which her hat was found lying. In confirmation of this, it was said a great black man, with an axe on his shoulder, was seen late that very evening coming out of the swamp, carrying a bundle tied in a check apron, with an air of surly triumph.

The most current and probable story, however, observes that Tom Walker grew so anxious about the fate of his wife and his property that he set out at length to seek them both at the Indian fort. During a long summer's afternoon he searched about the gloomy place, but no wife

was to be seen. He called her name repeatedly, but she was nowhere to be heard. The bittern alone responded to his voice, as he flew screaming by; or the bull-frog croaked dolefully from a neighboring pool. At length, it is said, just in the brown hour of twilight, when the owls began to hoot and the bats to flit about, his attention was attracted by the clamor of carrion crows hovering about a cypress-tree. He looked up and beheld a bundle tied in a check apron and hanging in the branches of the tree, with a great vulture perched hard by, as if keeping watch upon it. He leaped with joy, for he recognized his wife's apron, and supposed it to contain the household valuables.

"Let us get hold of the property," said he, consolingly, to himself, "and we will endeavor to do without the woman."

As he scrambled up the tree, the vulture spread its wide wings and sailed off, screaming, into the deep shadows of the forest. Tom seized the checked apron, but, woful sight! found nothing but a heart and liver tied up in it!

Such, according to this most authentic old story, was all that was to be found of Tom's wife. She had probably attempted to deal with the black man as she had been accustomed to deal with her husband; but though a female scold is generally considered a match for the devil, yet in this instance she appears to have had the worst of it. She must have died game, however; for it is said Tom noticed many prints of cloven feet deeply stamped about the tree, and found handfuls of hair, that looked as if they had been plucked from the coarse black shock of the woodsman. Tom knew his wife's prowess by experience. He shrugged his shoulders as he looked at the signs of fierce clapper-clawing. "Egad," said he to himself, "Old Scratch must have had a tough time of it!"

Tom consoled himself for the loss of his property, with the loss of his wife, for he was a man of fortitude. He

even felt something like gratitude toward the black woodsman, who, he considered, had done him a kindness. He sought, therefore, to cultivate a further acquaintance with him, but for some time without success; the old black-legs played shy, for, whatever people may think, he is not always to be had for the calling; he knows how to play his cards when pretty sure of his game.

At length, it is said, when delay had whetted Tom's eagerness to the quick and prepared him to agree to anything rather than not gain the promised treasure, he met the black man one evening in his usual woodsman's dress, with his axe on his shoulder, sauntering along the swamp and humming a tune. He affected to receive Tom's advances with great indifference, made brief replies, and went on humming his tune.

By degrees, however, Tom brought him to business, and they began to haggle about the terms on which the former was to have the pirate's treasure. There was one condition which need not be mentioned, being generally understood in all cases where the devil grants favors; but there were others about which, though of less importance, he was inflexibly obstinate. He insisted that the money found through his means should be employed in his service. He proposed, therefore, that Tom should employ it in the black traffic; that is to say, that he should fit out a slave-ship. This, however, Tom resolutely refused; he was bad enough in all conscience, but the devil himself could not tempt him to turn slave-trader.

Finding Tom so squeamish on this point, he did not insist upon it, but proposed, instead, that he should turn usurer; the devil being extremely anxious for the increase of usurers, looking upon them as his peculiar people.

To this no objections were made, for it was just to Tom's taste.

"You shall open a broker's shop in Boston next month," said the black man.

"I'll do it to-morrow, if you wish," said Tom Walker.

"You shall lend money at two per cent. a month."

"Egad, I'll charge four!" replied Tom Walker.

"You shall extort bonds, foreclose mortgages, drive the merchants to bankruptcy—"

"I'll drive them to the devil," cried Tom Walker.

"*You* are the usurer for my money!" said black-legs with delight. "When will you want the rhino?"

"This very night."

"Done!" said the devil.

"Done!" said Tom Walker. So they shook hands and struck a bargain.

A few days' time saw Tom Walker seated behind his desk in a counting-house in Boston.

His reputation for a ready-moneyed man, who would lend money out for a good consideration, soon spread abroad. Everybody remembers the time of Governor Belcher, when money was particularly scarce. It was a time of paper credit. The country had been deluged with government bills; the famous Land Bank had been established; there had been a rage for speculating; the people had run mad with schemes for new settlements, for building cities in the wilderness; land-jobbers went about with maps of grants and townships and Eldorados, lying nobody knew where, but which everybody was ready to purchase. In a word, the great speculating fever which breaks out every now and then in the country had raged to an alarming degree, and everybody was dreaming of making sudden fortunes from nothing. As usual, the fever had subsided, the dream had gone off, and the imaginary fortunes with it; the patients were left in doleful plight, and the whole country resounded with the consequent cry of "hard times."

At this propitious time of public distress did Tom Walker set up as usurer in Boston. His door was soon thronged by customers. The needy and adventurous, the gambling speculator, the dreaming land-jobber, the thriftless tradesman, the merchant with cracked credit—in short, every one driven to raise money by desperate means and desperate sacrifices hurried to Tom Walker.

Thus Tom was the universal friend to the needy, and acted like "a friend in need"; that is to say, he always exacted good pay and security. In proportion to the distress of the applicant was the hardness of his terms. He accumulated bonds and mortgages, gradually squeezed his customers closer and closer, and sent them at length, dry as a sponge, from his door.

In this way he made money hand over hand, became a rich and mighty man, and exalted his cocked hat upon "Change." He built himself, as usual, a vast house, out of ostentation, but left the greater part of it unfinished and unfurnished, out of parsimony. He even set up a carriage in the fulness of his vain-glory, though he nearly starved the horses which drew it; and, as the ungreased wheels groaned and screeched on the axle-trees, you would have thought you heard the souls of the poor debtors he was squeezing.

As Tom waxed old, however, he grew thoughtful. Having secured the good things of this world, he began to feel anxious about those of the next. He thought with regret of the bargain he had made with his black friend, and set his wits to work to cheat him out of the conditions. He became, therefore, all of a sudden, a violent church-goer. He prayed loudly and strenuously, as if heaven were to be taken by force of lungs. Indeed, one might always tell when he had sinned most during the week by the clamor of his Sunday devotion. The quiet Christians who had

been modestly and steadfastly travelling Zionward were struck with self-reproach at seeing themselves so suddenly outstripped in their career by this new-made convert. Tom was as rigid in religious as in money matters; he was a stern supervisor and censurer of his neighbors, and seemed to think every sin entered up to their account became a credit on his own side of the page. He even talked of the expediency of reviving the persecution of Quakers and Anabaptists. In a word, Tom's zeal became as notorious as his riches.

Still, in spite of all this strenuous attention to forms, Tom had a lurking dread that the devil, after all, would have his due. That he might not be taken unawares, therefore, it is said he always carried a small Bible in his coat-pocket. He had also a great folio Bible on his counting-house desk, and would frequently be found reading it when people called on business; on such occasions he would lay his green spectacles in the book, to mark the place, while he turned round to drive some usurious bargain.

Some say that Tom grew a little crack-brained in his old days, and that, fancying his end approaching, he had his horse new shod, saddled, and bridled, and buried with his feet uppermost; because he supposed that at the last day the world would be turned upside-down; in which case he should find his horse standing ready for mounting, and he was determined at the worst to give his old friend a run for it. This, however, is probably a mere old wives' fable. If he really did take such a precaution, it was totally superfluous; at least so says the authentic old legend, which closes his story in the following manner:

One hot summer afternoon in the dog-days, just as a terrible black thunder-gust was coming up, Tom sat in his counting-house, in his white linen cap and India silk morning-gown. He was on the point of foreclosing a mortgage,

by which he would complete the ruin of an unlucky land-speculator for whom he had professed the greatest friendship. The poor land-jobber begged him to grant a few months' indulgence. Tom had grown testy and irritated, and refused another delay.

"My family will be ruined, and brought upon the parish," said the land-jobber.

"Charity begins at home," replied Tom; "I must take care of myself in these hard times."

"You have made so much money out of me," said the speculator.

Tom lost his patience and his piety. "The devil take me," said he, "if I have made a farthing!"

Just then there were three loud knocks at the street door. He stepped out to see who was there. A black man was holding a black horse, which neighed and stamped with impatience.

"Tom, you're come for," said the black fellow, gruffly. Tom shrank back, but too late. He had left his little Bible at the bottom of his coat-pocket and his big Bible on the desk buried under the mortgage he was about to foreclose: never was sinner taken more unawares. The black man whisked him like a child into the saddle, gave the horse the lash, and away he galloped, with Tom on his back, in the midst of the thunder-storm. The clerks stuck their pens behind their ears, and stared after him from the windows. Away went Tom Walker, dashing down the streets, his white cap bobbing up and down, his morning-gown fluttering in the wind, and his steed striking fire out of the pavement at every bound. When the clerks turned to look for the black man, he had disappeared.

Tom Walker never returned to foreclose the mortgage. A countryman, who lived on the border of the swamp, reported that in the height of the thunder-gust he had heard

a great clattering of hoofs and a howling along the road, and running to the window caught sight of a figure, such as I have described, on a horse that galloped like mad across the fields, over the hills, and down into the black hemlock swamp toward the old Indian fort, and that shortly after a thunder-bolt falling in that direction seemed to set the whole forest in a blaze.

The good people of Boston shook their heads and shrugged their shoulders, but had been so much accustomed to witches and goblins, and tricks of the devil, in all kinds of shapes, from the first settlement of the colony, that they were not so much horror-struck as might have been expected. Trustees were appointed to take charge of Tom's effects. There was nothing, however, to administer upon. On searching his coffers, all his bonds and mortgages were reduced to cinders. In place of gold and silver, his iron chest was filled with chips and shavings; two skeletons lay in his stable instead of his half-starved horses, and the very next day his great house took fire and was burned to the ground.

Such was the end of Tom Walker and his ill-gotten wealth. Let all gripping money-brokers lay this story to heart. The truth of it is not to be doubted. The very hole under the oak-trees, whence he dug Kidd's money, is to be seen to this day; and the neighboring swamp and old Indian fort are often haunted in stormy nights by a figure on horseback, in morning-gown and white cap, which is doubtless the troubled spirit of the usurer. In fact, the story has resolved itself into a proverb, and is the origin of that popular saying, so prevalent throughout New England, of "The devil and Tom Walker."

V

DR. HEIDEGGER'S EXPERIMENT

BY

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1807–1864)

Dr. Heidegger's Experiment

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1807–1864)

THAT very singular man, old Doctor Heidegger, once invited four venerable friends to meet him in his study. There were three white-bearded gentlemen, Mr. Medbourne, Colonel Killigrew, and Mr. Gascoigne, and a withered gentlewoman whose name was the Widow Wycherley. They were all melancholy old creatures, who had been unfortunate in life, and whose greatest misfortune it was that they were not long ago in their graves. Mr. Medbourne, in the vigor of his age, had been a prosperous merchant, but had lost his all by a frantic speculation, and was no little better than a mendicant. Colonel Killigrew had wasted his best years, and his health and substance, in the pursuit of sinful pleasures, which had given birth to a brood of pains, such as the gout and divers other torments of soul and body. Mr. Gascoigne was a ruined politician, a man of evil fame, or at least had been so, till time had buried him from the knowledge of the present generation, and made him obscure instead of infamous. As for the Widow Wycherley, tradition tells us that she was a great beauty in her day; but, for a long while past, she had lived in deep seclusion, on account of certain scandalous stories which had prejudiced the gentry of the town against her. It is a circumstance worth mentioning that each of these three old gentlemen, Mr. Medbourne, Colonel Killigrew, and Mr. Gascoigne, were early lovers of the

Widow Wycherley, and had once been on the point of cutting each other's throats for her sake. And, before proceeding further, I will merely hint that Doctor Heidegger and all his four guests were sometimes thought to be a little beside themselves; as is not unfrequently the case with old people, when worried either by present troubles or woful recollections.

"My dear friends," said Doctor Heidegger, motioning them to be seated, "I am desirous of your assistance in one of those little experiments with which I amuse myself here in my study."

If all stories were true, Doctor Heidegger's study must have been a very curious place. It was a dim, old-fashioned chamber, festooned with cobwebs and besprinkled with antique dust. Around the walls stood several oaken bookcases, the lower shelves of which were filled with rows of gigantic folios and black-letter quartos, and the upper with little parchment-covered duodecimos. Over the central bookcase was a bronze bust of Hippocrates, with which, according to some authorities, Doctor Heidegger was accustomed to hold consultations in all difficult cases of his practice. In the obscurest corner of the room stood a tall and narrow oaken closet, with its door ajar, within which doubtfully appeared a skeleton. Between two of the bookcases hung a looking-glass, presenting its high and dusty plate within a tarnished gilt frame. Among many wonderful stories related of this mirror, it was fabled that the spirits of all the doctor's deceased patients dwelt within its verge, and would stare him in the face whenever he looked thitherward. The opposite side of the chamber was ornamented with the full-length portrait of a young lady, arrayed in the faded magnificence of silk, satin, and brocade, and with a visage as faded as her dress. Above half a century ago Doctor Heidegger had been on the

point of marriage with this young lady; but, being affected with some slight disorder, she had swallowed one of her lover's prescriptions, and died on the bridal evening. The greatest curiosity of the study remains to be mentioned; it was a ponderous folio volume, bound in black leather, with massive silver clasps. There were no letters on the back, and nobody could tell the title of the book. But it was well known to be a book of magic; and once, when a chambermaid had lifted it, merely to brush away the dust, the skeleton had rattled in its closet, the picture of the young lady had stepped one foot upon the floor, and several ghastly faces had peeped forth from the mirror; while the brazen head of Hippocrates frowned, and said: "Forbear!"

Such was Doctor Heidegger's study. On the summer afternoon of our tale a small round table, as black as ebony, stood in the centre of the room, sustaining a cut-glass vase of beautiful form and workmanship. The sunshine came through the window, between the heavy festoons of two faded damask curtains, and fell directly across this vase; so that a mild splendor was reflected from it on the ashen visages of the five old people who sat around. Four champagne glasses were also on the table.

"My dear old friends," repeated Doctor Heidegger, "may I reckon on your aid in performing an exceedingly curious experiment?"

Now Doctor Heidegger was a very strange old gentleman, whose eccentricity had become the nucleus for a thousand fantastic stories. Some of these fables, to my shame be it spoken, might possibly be traced back to mine own veracious self; and if any passages of the present tale should startle the reader's faith, I must be content to bear the stigma of a fiction-monger.

When the doctor's four guests heard him talk of his proposed experiment, they anticipated nothing more

wonderful than the murder of a mouse in an air-pump or the examination of a cobweb by the microscope, or some similiar nonsense, with which he was constantly in the habit of pestering his intimates. But without waiting for a reply, Doctor Heidegger hobbled across the chamber, and returned with the same ponderous folio, bound in black leather, which common report affirmed to be a book of magic. Undoing the silver clasps, he opened the volume, and took from among its black-letter pages a rose, or what was once a rose, though now the green leaves and crimson petals had assumed one brownish hue, and the ancient flower seemed ready to crumble to dust in the doctor's hands.

"This rose," said Doctor Heidegger, with a sigh, "this same withered and crumbling flower, blossomed five and fifty years ago. It was given me by Sylvia Ward, whose portrait hangs yonder, and I meant to wear it in my bosom at our wedding. Five and fifty years it has been treasured between the leaves of this old volume. Now, would you deem it possible that this rose of half a century could ever bloom again?"

"Nonsense!" said the Widow Wycherley, with a peevish toss of her head. "You might as well ask whether an old woman's wrinkled face could ever bloom again."

"See!" answered Doctor Heidegger.

He uncovered the vase, and threw the faded rose into the water which it contained. At first, it lay lightly on the surface of the fluid, appearing to imbibe none of its moisture. Soon, however, a singular change began to be visible. The crushed and dried petals stirred, and assumed a deepening tinge of crimson, as if the flower were reviving from a death-like slumber; the slender stalk and twigs of foliage became green; and there was the rose of half a century, looking as fresh as when Sylvia Ward had first given it to her lover.

It was scarcely full blown; for some of its delicate red leaves curled modestly around its moist bosom, within which two or three dewdrops were sparkling.

"That is certainly a very pretty deception," said the doctor's friends; careless, however, for they had witnessed greater miracles at a conjurer's show; "pray how was it effected?"

"Did you ever hear of the 'Fountain of Youth,'" asked Doctor Heidegger, "which Ponce de Leon, the Spanish adventurer, went in search of, two or three centuries ago?"

"But did Ponce de Leon ever find it?" said the Widow Wycherley.

"No," answered Doctor Heidegger, "for he never sought it in the right place. The famous Fountain of Youth, if I am rightly informed, is situated in the southern part of the Floridian peninsula, not far from Lake Macaco. Its source is overshadowed by several magnolias, which, though numberless centuries old, have been kept as fresh as violets, by the virtues of this wonderful water. An acquaintance of mine, knowing my curiosity in such matters, has sent me what you see in the vase."

"Ahem!" said Colonel Killigrew, who believed not a word of the doctor's story; "and what may be the effect of this fluid on the human frame?"

"You shall judge for yourself, my dear Colonel," replied Doctor Heidegger; "and all of you, my respected friends, are welcome to so much of this admirable fluid as may restore to you the bloom of youth. For my own part, having had much trouble in growing old, I am in no hurry to grow young again. With your permission, therefore, I will merely watch the progress of the experiment."

While he spoke, Doctor Heidegger had been filling the four champagne glasses with the water of the Fountain of

Youth. It was apparently impregnated with an effervescent gas, for little bubbles were continually ascending from the depths of the glasses, and bursting in silvery spray at the surface. As the liquor diffused a pleasant perfume, the old people doubted now that it possessed cordial and comfortable properties; and though utter sceptics as to its rejuvenescent power, they were inclined to swallow it at once. But Doctor Heidegger besought them to stay a moment.

"Before you drink, my respectable old friends," said he, "it would be well that, with the experience of a lifetime to direct you, you should draw up a few general rules for your guidance, in passing a second time through the perils of youth. Think what a sin and shame it would be if, with your peculiar advantages, you should not become patterns of virtue and wisdom to all the young people of the age!"

The doctor's four venerable friends made him no answer, except by a feeble and tremulous laugh; so very ridiculous was the idea that, knowing how closely repentance treads behind the steps of error, they should ever go astray again.

"Drink, then," said the doctor, bowing: "I rejoice that I have so well selected the subjects of my experiment."

With palsied hands they raised the glasses to their lips. The liquor, if it really possessed such virtues as Doctor Heidegger imputed to it, could not have been bestowed on four human beings who needed it more wofully. They looked as if they had never known what youth or pleasure was, but had been the offspring of nature's dotage, and always the gray, decrepit, sapless, miserable creatures, who now sat stooping round the doctor's table, without life enough in their souls or bodies to be animated even by the prospect of growing young again. They drank off the water, and replaced their glasses on the table.

Assuredly there was an almost immediate improvement in the aspect of the party, not unlike what might have been produced by a glass of generous wine, together with a sudden glow of cheerful sunshine, brightening over all their visages at once. There was a healthful suffusion on their cheeks, instead of the ashen hue that had made them look so corpselike. They gazed at one another, and fancied that some magic power had really begun to smooth away the deep and sad inscriptions which Father Time had been so long engraving on their brows. The Widow Wycherley adjusted her cap, for she felt almost like a woman again.

"Give us more of this wondrous water!" cried they, eagerly. "We are younger—but we are still too old! Quick—give us more!"

"Patience! patience!" quoth Doctor Heidegger, who sat watching the experiment with philosophic coolness. "You have been a long time growing old. Surely you might be content to grow young in half an hour! But the water is at your service."

Again he filled their glasses with the liquor of youth, enough of which still remained in the vase to turn half the old people in the city to the age of their own grandchildren. While the bubbles were yet sparkling on the brim, the doctor's four guests snatched their glasses from the table, and swallowed the contents at a single gulp. Was it delusion? Even while the draught was passing down their throats it seemed to have wrought a change on their whole systems. Their eyes grew clear and bright; a dark shade deepened among their silvery locks; they sat round the table, three gentlemen of middle age, and a woman hardly beyond her buxom prime.

"My dear widow, you are charming!" cried Colonel Killigrew, whose eyes had been fixed upon her face, while the

shadows of age were flitting from it like darkness from the crimson daybreak.

The fair widow knew of old that Colonel Killigrew's compliments were not always measured by sober truth; so she started up and ran to the mirror, still dreading that the ugly visage of an old woman would meet her gaze. Meanwhile the three gentlemen behaved in such a manner as proved that the water of the Fountain of Youth possessed some intoxicating qualities, unless, indeed, their exhilaration of spirits were merely a lightsome dizziness, caused by the sudden removal of the weight of years. Mr. Gascoigne's mind seemed to run on political topics, but whether relating to the past, present, or future could not easily be determined, since the same ideas and phrases have been in vogue these fifty years. Now he rattled forth full-throated sentences about patriotism, national glory, and the people's rights; now he muttered some perilous stuff or other, in a sly and doubtful whisper, so cautiously that even his own conscience could scarcely catch the secret; and now, again, he spoke in measured accents and a deeply deferential tone, as if a royal ear were listening to his well-turned periods. Colonel Killigrew all this time had been trolling forth a jolly battle-song, and ringing his glass toward the buxom figure of the Widow Wycherley. On the other side of the table Mr. Medbourne was involved in a calculation of dollars and cents, with which was strangely intermingled a project for supplying the East Indies with ice, by harnessing a team of whales to the polar icebergs.

As for the Widow Wycherley, she stood before the mirror, courtesying and simpering to her own image, and greeting it as the friend whom she loved better than all the world beside. She thrust her face close to the glass to see whether some long-remembered wrinkle or crow's-

foot had indeed vanished. She examined whether the snow had so entirely melted from her hair that the venerable cap could be safely thrown aside. At last, turning briskly away, she came with a sort of dancing step to the table.

"My dear old doctor," cried she, "pray favor me with another glass!"

"Certainly, my dear madam, certainly!" replied the complaisant doctor. "See! I have already filled the glasses."

There, in fact, stood the four glasses, brimful of this wonderful water, the delicate spray of which, as it effervesced from the surface, resembled the tremulous glitter of diamonds. It was now so nearly sunset that the chamber had grown duskier than ever; but a mild and moonlike splendor gleamed from within the vase, and rested alike on the four guests, and on the doctor's venerable figure. He sat in a high-backed, elaborately carved oaken chair, with a gray dignity of aspect that might have well befitted that very Father Time, whose power had never been disputed, save by this fortunate company. Even while quaffing the third draught of the Fountain of Youth, they were almost awed by the expression of his mysterious visage.

But the next moment the exhilarating gush of young life shot through their veins. They were now in the happy prime of youth. Age, with its miserable train of cares, and sorrows, and diseases, was remembered only as the trouble of a dream, from which they had joyously awoke. The fresh gloss of the soul, so early lost, and without which the world's successive scenes had been but a gallery of faded pictures, again threw its enchantment over all their prospects. They felt like new-created beings in a new-created universe.

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"We are young! We are young!" they cried, exultingly.

Youth, like the extremity of age, had effaced the strongly marked characteristics of middle life, and mutually assimilated them all. They were a group of merry youngsters, almost maddened with the exuberant frolicsomeness of their years. The most singular effect of their gayety was an impulse to mock the infirmity and decrepitude of which they had so lately been the victims. They laughed loudly at their old-fashioned attire—the wide-skirted coats and flapped waistcoats of the young men, and the ancient cap and gown of the blooming girl. One limped across the floor like a gouty grandfather; one set a pair of spectacles astride of his nose, and pretended to pore over the black-letter pages of the book of magic; a third seated himself in an arm-chair, and strove to imitate the venerable dignity of Doctor Heidegger. Then all shouted mirthfully, and leaped about the room. The Widow Wycherley—if so fresh a damsel could be called a widow—tripped up to the doctor's chair with a mischievous merriment in her rosy face.

"Doctor, you dear old soul," cried she, "get up and dance with me!" And then the four young people laughed louder than ever, to think what a queer figure the poor old doctor would cut.

"Pray excuse me," answered the doctor, quietly. "I am old and rheumatic, and my dancing days were over long ago. But either of these gay young gentlemen will be glad of so pretty a partner."

"Dance with me, Clara!" cried Colonel Killigrew.

"She promised me her hand fifty years ago!" exclaimed Mr. Medbourne.

They all gathered round her. One caught both her hands in his passionate grasp—another threw his arm about her waist—the third buried his hand among the curls that

clustered beneath the widow's cap. Blushing, panting, struggling, chiding, laughing, her warm breath fanning each of their faces by turns, she strove to disengage herself, yet still remained in their triple embrace. Never was there a livelier picture of youthful rivalship, with bewitching beauty for the prize. Yet, by a strange deception, owing to the duskiness of the chamber and the antique dresses which they still wore, the tall mirror is said to have reflected the figures of the three old, gray, withered grandsires, ridiculously contending for the skinny ugliness of a shrivelled grandam.

But they were young: their burning passions proved them so. Inflamed to madness by the coquetry of the girl-widow, who neither granted nor quite withheld her favors, the three rivals began to interchange threatening glances. Still keeping hold of the fair prize, they grappled fiercely at one another's throats. As they struggled to and fro, the table was overturned, and the vase dashed into a thousand fragments. The precious Water of Youth flowed in a bright stream across the floor, moistening the wings of a butterfly, which, grown old in the decline of summer, had alighted there to die. The insect fluttered lightly through the chamber, and settled on the snowy head of Doctor Heidegger.

"Come, come, gentlemen!—come, Madame Wycherley!" exclaimed the doctor, "I really must protest against this riot."

They stood still and shivered; for it seemed as if gray Time were calling them back from their sunny youth, far down into the chill and darksome vale of years. They looked at old Doctor Heidegger, who sat in his carved armchair, holding the rose of half a century which he had rescued from among the fragments of the shattered vase. At the motion of his hand the rioters resumed their seats,

the more readily because their violent exertions had wearied them, youthful though they were.

"My poor Sylvia's rose!" ejaculated Doctor Heidegger, holding it in the light of the sunset clouds; "it appears to be fading again."

And so it was. Even while the party were looking at it the flower continued to shrivel up, till it became as dry and fragile as when the doctor had first thrown it into the vase. He shook off the few drops of moisture which clung to its petals.

"I love it as well thus as in its dewy freshness," observed he, pressing the withered rose to his withered lips. While he spoke, the butterfly fluttered down from the doctor's snowy head, and fell upon the floor.

His guests shivered again. A strange chillness, whether of the body or spirit they could not tell, was creeping gradually over them all. They gazed at one another, and fancied that each fleeting moment snatched away a charm, and left a deepening furrow where none had been before. Was it an illusion? Had the changes of a lifetime been crowded into so brief a space, and were they now four aged people, sitting with their old friend, Doctor Heidegger?

"Are we grown old again so soon?" cried they, dolefully.

In truth, they had. The Water of Youth possessed merely a virtue more transient than that of wine. The delirium which it created had effervesced away. Yes, they were old again! With a shuddering impulse, that showed her a woman still, the widow clasped her skinny hands over her face, and wished that the coffin lid were over it, since it could be no longer beautiful.

"Yes, friends, ye are old again," said Doctor Heidegger; "and lo! the Water of Youth is all lavished on the ground. Well, I bemoan it not; for if the fountain gushed at my doorstep, I would not stoop to bathe my lips in it—no,

though its delirium were for years instead of moments. Such is the lesson ye have taught me!"

But the doctor's four friends had taught no such lesson to themselves. They resolved forthwith to make a pilgrimage to Florida, and quaff at morning, noon, and night from the Fountain of Youth.

VI

THE PURLOINED LETTER

BY

Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849)

The Purloined Letter[1]

Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849)

AT Paris, just after dark one gusty evening in the autumn of 18—, I was enjoying the twofold luxury of meditation and a meerschaum, in company with my friend, C. Auguste Dupin, in his little back library, or book-closet, *au troisième*, No. 33 Rue Dunôt, Faubourg St. Germain. For one hour at least we had maintained a profound silence, while each, to any casual observer, might have seemed intently and exclusively occupied with the curling eddies of smoke that oppressed the atmosphere of the chamber. For myself, however, I was mentally discussing certain topics which had formed matter for conversation between us at an earlier period of the evening; I mean the affair of the Rue Morgue, and the mystery attending the murder of Marie Rogêt. I looked upon it, therefore, as something of a coincidence, when the door of our apartment was thrown open and admitted our old acquaintance, Monsieur G——, the Prefect of the Parisian police.

We gave him a hearty welcome; for there was nearly half as much of the entertaining as of the contemptible about the man, and we had not seen him for several years. We had been sitting in the dark, and Dupin now arose for the purpose of lighting a lamp, but sat down again, with-

[1] The pattern in method for all detective stories.

out doing so, upon G——'s saying that he had called to consult us, or rather to ask the opinion of my friend, about some official business which had occasioned a great deal of trouble.

"If it is any point requiring reflection," observed Dupin, as he forebore to enkindle the wick, "we shall examine it to better purpose in the dark."

"That is another of your odd notions," said the Prefect, who had the fashion of calling everything "odd" that was beyond his comprehension, and thus lived amid an absolute legion of "oddities."

"Very true," said Dupin, as he supplied his visitor with a pipe, and rolled toward him a comfortable chair.

"And what is the difficulty now?" I asked. "Nothing more in the assassination way, I hope?"

"Oh no, nothing of that nature. The fact is, the business is *very* simple indeed, and I make no doubt that we can manage it sufficiently well ourselves; but then I thought Dupin would like to hear the details of it, because it is so excessively *odd*."

"Simple and odd," said Dupin.

"Why, yes; and not exactly that, either. The fact is, we have all been a good deal puzzled because the affair *is* so simple, and yet baffles us altogether."

"Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault," said my friend.

"What nonsense you *do* talk!" replied the Prefect, laughing heartily.

"Perhaps the mystery is a little *too* plain," said Dupin.

"Oh, good heavens! who ever heard of such an idea?"

"A little *too* self-evident."

"Ha! ha! ha!—ha! ha! ha!—ho! ho! ho!" roared our visitor, profoundly amused. "Oh, Dupin, you will be the death of me yet!"

"And what, after all, *is* the matter on hand?" I asked.

"Why, I will tell you," replied the Prefect, as he gave a long, steady, and contemplative puff, and settled himself in his chair. "I will tell you in a few words; but, before I begin, let me caution you that this is an affair demanding the greatest secrecy, and that I should most probably lose the position I now hold were it known that I confided it to any one."

"Proceed," said I.

"Or not," said Dupin.

"Well, then; I have received personal information, from a very high quarter, that a certain document of the last importance has been purloined from the royal apartments. The individual who purloined it is known; this beyond a doubt; he was seen to take it. It is known, also, that it still remains in his possession."

"How is this known?" asked Dupin.

"It is clearly inferred," replied the Prefect, "from the nature of the document, and from the non-appearance of certain results which would at once arise from its passing *out* of the robber's possession—that is to say, from his employing it as he must design in the end to employ it."

"Be a little more explicit," I said.

"Well, I may venture so far as to say that the paper gives its holder a certain power in a certain quarter where such power is immensely valuable." The Prefect was fond of the cant of diplomacy.

"Still I do not quite understand," said Dupin.

"No? Well, the disclosure of the document to a third person, who shall be nameless, would bring in question the honor of a personage of the most exalted station, and this fact gives the holder of the document an ascendancy over the illustrious personage whose honor and peace are so jeopardized."

"But this ascendancy," I interposed, "would depend upon the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber. Who would dare—"

"The thief," said G——, "is the Minister D——, who dares all things, those unbecoming as well as those becoming a man. The method of the theft was not less ingenious than bold. The document in question—a letter, to be frank—had been received by the personage robbed while alone in the royal *boudoir*. During its perusal she was suddenly interrupted by the entrance of the other exalted personage from whom especially it was her wish to conceal it. After a hurried and vain endeavor to thrust it in a drawer, she was forced to place it, open as it was, upon a table. The address, however, was uppermost, and, the contents thus unexposed, the letter escaped notice. At this juncture enters the Minister D——. His lynx eye immediately perceives the paper, recognizes the handwriting of the address, observes the confusion of the personage addressed, and fathoms her secret. After some business transactions, hurried through in his ordinary manner, he produces a letter somewhat similar to the one in question, opens it, pretends to read it, and then places it in close juxtaposition to the other. Again he converses, for some fifteen minutes, upon the public affairs. At length, in taking leave, he takes also from the table the letter to which he had no claim. Its rightful owner saw, but. of course, dared not call attention to the act, in the presence of the third personage who stood at her elbow. The Minister decamped, leaving his own letter—one of no importance—upon the table."

"Here, then," said Dupin to me, "you have precisely what you demand to make the ascendancy complete—the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber."

"Yes," replied the Prefect, "and the power thus attained has. for some months past, been wielded, for political

purposes, to a very dangerous extent. The personage robbed is more thoroughly convinced, every day, of the necessity of reclaiming her letter. But this, of course, cannot be done openly. In fine, driven to despair, she has committed the matter to me."

"Than whom," said Dupin, amid a perfect whirlwind of smoke, "no more sagacious agent could, I suppose, be desired, or even imagined."

"You flatter me," replied the Prefect; "but it is possible that some such opinion may have been entertained."

"It is clear," said I, "as you observe, that the letter is still in the possession of the Minister; since it is this possession, and not any employment of the letter, which bestows the power. With the employment the power departs."

"True," said G——; "and upon this conviction I proceeded. My first care was to make thorough search of the Minister's hotel; and here my chief embarrassment lay in the necessity of searching without his knowledge. Beyond all things, I have been warned of the danger which would result from giving him reason to suspect our design."

"But," said I, "you are quite *au fait* in these investigations. The Parisian police have done this thing often before."

"Oh yes, and for this reason I did not despair. The habits of the Minister gave me, too, a great advantage. He is frequently absent from home all night. His servants are by no means numerous. They sleep at a distance from their master's apartment, and, being chiefly Neapolitans, are readily made drunk. I have keys, as you know, with which I can open any chamber or cabinet in Paris. For three months a night has not passed during the greater part of which I have not been engaged, personally, in ransacking the D—— Hotel. My honor is interested, and, to mention a great secret, the reward is enormous. So I

did not abandon the search until I had become fully satisfied that the thief is a more astute man than myself. I fancy that I have investigated every nook and corner of the premises in which it is possible that the paper can be concealed."

"But is it not possible," I suggested, "that although the letter may be in the possession of the Minister, as it unquestionably is, he may have concealed it elsewhere than upon his own premises?"

"This is barely possible," said Dupin. "The present peculiar condition of affairs at court, and especially of those intrigues in which D—— is known to be involved, would render the instant availability of the document—its susceptibility of being produced at a moment's notice—a point of nearly equal importance with its possession."

"Its susceptibility of being produced?" said I.

"That is to say, of being *destroyed*," said Dupin.

"True," I observed; "the paper is clearly, then, upon the premises. As for its being upon the person of the Minister, we may consider that as out of the question."

"Entirely," said the Prefect. "He has been twice waylaid, as if by footpads, and his person rigidly searched under my own inspection."

"You might have spared yourself this trouble," said Dupin. "D——, I presume, is not altogether a fool; and, if not, must have anticipated these waylayings, as a matter of course."

"Not *altogether* a fool," said G——; "but, then, he is a poet, which I take to be only one remove from a fool."

"True," said Dupin, after a long and thoughtful whiff from his meerschaum, "although I have been guilty of certain doggrel myself."

"Suppose you detail," said I, "the particulars of your search."

"Why, the fact is, we took our time, and we searched *everywhere*. I have had long experience in these affairs. I took the entire building, room by room, devoting the nights of a whole week to each. We examined, first, the furniture of each apartment. We opened every possible drawer; and I presume you know that, to a properly trained police-agent, such a thing as a '*secret*' drawer is impossible. Any man is a dolt who permits a 'secret' drawer to escape him in a search of this kind. The thing is *so* plain. There is a certain amount of bulk—of space—to be accounted for in every cabinet. Then we have accurate rules. The fiftieth part of a line could not escape us. After the cabinets we took the chairs. The cushions we probed with the fine long needles you have seen me employ. From the tables we removed the tops."

"Why so?"

"Sometimes the top of a table, or other similarly arranged piece of furniture, is removed by the person wishing to conceal an article; then the leg is excavated, the article deposited within the cavity, and the top replaced. The bottoms and tops of bedposts are employed in the same way."

"But could not the cavity be detected by sounding?" I asked.

"By no means, if, when the article is deposited, a sufficient wadding of cotton be placed around it. Besides, in our case, we were obliged to proceed without noise."

"But you could not have removed—you could not have taken to pieces *all* articles of furniture in which it would have been possible to make a deposit in the manner you mention. A letter may be compressed into a thin spiral roll, not differing much in shape or bulk from a large knitting-needle, and in this form it might be inserted into the rung of a chair, for example. You did not take to pieces all the chairs?"

"Certainly not; but we did better—we examined the rungs of every chair in the hotel, and, indeed, the jointings of every description of furniture, by the aid of a most powerful microscope. Had there been any traces of recent disturbance we should not have failed to detect it instantly. A single grain of gimlet-dust, for example, would have been as obvious as an apple. Any disorder in the gluing—any unusual gaping in the joints—would have sufficed to insure detection."

"I presume you looked to the mirrors, between the boards and the plates, and you probed the beds and the bedclothes, as well as the curtains and carpets."

"That, of course; and when we had absolutely completed every particle of the furniture in this way, then we examined the house itself. We divided its entire surface into compartments, which we numbered, so that none might be missed; then we scrutinized each individual square inch throughout the premises, including the two houses immediately adjoining, with the microscope, as before."

"The two houses adjoining!" I exclaimed. "You must have had a great deal of trouble."

"We had; but the reward offered is prodigious."

"You include the *grounds* about the houses?"

"All the grounds are paved with brick. They gave us comparatively little trouble. We examined the moss between the bricks, and found it undisturbed."

"You looked among D——'s papers, of course, and into the books of the library?"

"Certainly; we opened every package and parcel; we not only opened every book, but we turned over every leaf in each volume, not contenting ourselves with a mere shake, according to the fashion of some of our police officers. We also measured the thickness of every book-*cover*, with the most accurate admeasurement, and applied

to each the most jealous scrutiny of the microscope. Had any of the bindings been recently meddled with, it would have been utterly impossible that the fact should have escaped observation. Some five or six volumes, just from the hands of the binder, we carefully probed, longitudinally, with the needles."

"You explored the floors beneath the carpets?"

"Beyond doubt. We removed every carpet, and examined the boards with the microscope."

"And the paper on the walls?"

"Yes."

"You looked into the cellars?"

"We did."

"Then," I said, "you have been making a miscalculation, and the letter is *not* upon the premises, as you suppose."

"I fear you are right there," said the Prefect. "And now, Dupin, what would you advise me to do?"

"To make a thorough research of the premises."

"That is absolutely needless," replied G——. "I am not more sure that I breathe than I am that the letter is not at the hotel."

"I have no better advice to give you," said Dupin. "You have, of course, an accurate description of the letter?"

"Oh yes!" And here the Prefect, producing a memorandum book, proceeded to read aloud a minute account of the internal, and especially of the external, appearance of the missing document. Soon after finishing the perusal of this description, he took his departure, more entirely depressed in spirits than I had ever known the good gentleman before.

In about a month afterward he paid us another visit, and found us occupied very nearly as before. He took a pipe and a chair, and entered into some ordinary conversation. At length I said:

"Well, but, G——, what of the purloined letter? I presume you have at last made up your mind that there is no such thing as overreaching the Minister?"

"Confound him, say I—yes; I made the re-examination, however, as Dupin suggested—but it was all labor lost, as I knew it would be."

"How much was the reward offered, did you say?" asked Dupin.

"Why, a very great deal—a *very* liberal reward—I don't like to say how much, precisely; but one thing I *will* say, that I wouldn't mind giving my individual check for fifty thousand francs to any one who could obtain me that letter. The fact is, it is becoming of more and more importance every day; and the reward has been lately doubled. If it were trebled, however, I could do no more than I have done."

"Why, yes," said Dupin, drawling, between the whiffs of his meerschaum, "I really—think, G——, you have not exerted yourself—to the utmost in this matter. You might—do a little more, I think, eh?"

"How?—in what way?"

"Why"—puff, puff—"you might"—puff, puff—"employ counsel in the matter, eh"—puff, puff, puff. "Do you remember the story they tell of Abernethy?"

"No; hang Abernethy!"

"To be sure! Hang him and welcome. But, once upon a time, a certain miser conceived the design of spunging upon this Abernethy for a medical opinion. Getting up, for this purpose, an ordinary conversation in a private company, he insinuated his case to the physician as that of an imaginary individual."

"'We will suppose,' said the miser, 'that his symptoms are such and such; now, doctor, what would *you* have directed him to take?'

"'Take!' said Abernethy. 'Why, take *advice*, to be sure.'"

"But," said the Prefect, a little discomposed, "*I* am *perfectly* willing to take advice, and to pay for it. I would *really* give fifty thousand francs to any one who would aid me in the matter."

"In that case," replied Dupin, opening a drawer, and producing a check-book, "you may as well fill me up a check for the amount mentioned. When you have signed it, I will hand you the letter."

I was astounded. The Prefect appeared absolutely thunder-stricken. For some minutes he remained speechless and motionless, looking incredulously at my friend with open mouth, and eyes that seemed starting from their sockets; then apparently recovering himself in some measure, he seized a pen, and after several pauses and vacant stares, finally filled up and signed a check for fifty thousand francs, and handed it across the table to Dupin. The latter examined it carefully and deposited it in his pocket-book; then, unlocking an *escritoire*, took thence a letter and gave it to the Prefect. This functionary grasped it in a perfect agony of joy, opened it with a trembling hand, cast a rapid glance at its contents, and then, scrambling and struggling to the door, rushed at length unceremoniously from the room and from the house, without having uttered a syllable since Dupin had requested him to fill up the check.

When he had gone, my friend entered into some explanation.

"The Parisian police," he said, "are exceedingly able in their way. They are persevering, ingenious, cunning, and thoroughly versed in the knowledge which their duties seem chiefly to demand. Thus, when G—— detailed to us his mode of searching the premises at the Hotel D——, I felt entire confidence in his having made a satisfactory investigation—so far as his labors extended."

"So far as his labors extended?" said I.

"Yes," said Dupin. "The measures adopted were not only the best of their kind, but carried out to absolute perfection. Had the letter been deposited within the range of their search, these fellows would, beyond a question, have found it."

I merely laughed—but he seemed quite serious in all that he said.

"The measures, then," he continued, "were good in their kind, and well executed; their defect lay in their being inapplicable to the case and to the man. A certain set of highly ingenious resources are, with the Prefect, a sort of Procrustean bed, to which he forcibly adapts his designs. But he perpetually errs by being too deep or too shallow for the matter in hand, and many a school-boy is a better reasoner than he. I knew one about eight years of age, whose success at guessing in the game of 'even and odd' attracted universal admiration. This game is simple, and is played with marbles. One player holds in his hand a number of these toys, and demands of another whether that number is even or odd. If the guess is right, the guesser wins one; if wrong, he loses one. The boy to whom I allude won all the marbles of the school. Of course, he had some principle of guessing; and this lay in mere observation and admeasurement of the astuteness of his opponents. For example, an arrant simpleton is his opponent, and, holding up his closed hand, asks, 'Are they even or odd?' Our school-boy replies, 'Odd,' and loses; but upon the second trial he wins, for he then says to himself: 'The simpleton had them even upon the first trial, and his amount of cunning is just sufficient to make him have them odd upon the second; I will therefore guess odd'; he guesses odd, and wins. Now, with a simpleton a degree above the first, he would have reasoned thus:

"This fellow finds that in the first instance I guessed odd, and, in the second, he will propose to himself, upon the first impulse, a simple variation from even to odd, as did the first simpleton; but then a second thought will suggest that this is too simple a variation, and finally he will decide upon putting it even as before. I will therefore guess even'; he guesses even, and wins. Now this mode of reasoning in the school-boy, whom his fellows termed 'Lucky,' what, in its last analysis, is it?"

"It is merely," I said, "an identification of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent."

"It is," said Dupin; "and, upon inquiring of the boy by what means he effected the *thorough* identification in which his success consisted, I received answer as follows: 'When I wish to find out how wise, or how stupid, or how good, or how wicked, is any one, or what are his thoughts at the moment, I fashion the expression of my face, as accurately as possible, in accordance with the expression of his, and then wait to see what thoughts or sentiments arise in my mind or heart, as if to match or correspond with the expression.' This response of the school-boy lies at the bottom of all the spurious profundity which has been attributed to Rochefoucault, to La Bougive, to Machiavelli, and to Campanella."

"And the identification," I said, "of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent, depends, if I understand you aright, upon the accuracy with which the opponent's intellect is admeasured."

"For its practical value it depends upon this," replied Dupin; "and the Prefect and his cohort fail so frequently, first, by default of this identification, and, secondly, by ill-admeasurement, or rather through non-admeasurement, of the intellect with which they are engaged. They consider only their *own* ideas of ingenuity; and, in searching for any-

thing hidden, advert only to the modes in which *they* would have hidden it. They are right in this much—that their own ingenuity is a faithful representative of that of *the mass;* but when the cunning of the individual felon is diverse in character from their own, the felon foils them of course. This always happens when it is above their own, and very usually when it is below. They have no variation of principle in their investigations; at best, when urged by some unusual emergency—by some extraordinary reward—they extend or exaggerate their old modes of *practice*, without touching their principles. What, for example, in this case of D——, has been done to vary the principle of action? What is all this boring, and probing, and sounding, and scrutinizing with the microscope, and dividing the surface of the building into registered square inches—what is it all but an exaggeration of the application of the one principle or set of principles of search, which are based upon the one set of notions retarding human ingenuity, to which the Prefect, in the long routine of his duty, has been accustomed? Do you not see he had taken it for granted that *all* men proceed to conceal a letter, not exactly in a gimlet-hole bored in a chair-leg, but, at least, in *some* out-of-the-way hole or corner suggested by the same tenor of thought which would urge a man to secrete a letter in a gimlet-hole bored in a chair-leg? And do you not see, also, that such *recherché* nooks for concealment are adapted only for ordinary occasions, and would be adopted only by ordinary intellects; for, in all cases of concealment, a disposal of the article concealed—a disposal of it in this *recherché* manner—is, in the very first instance, presumable and presumed; and thus its discovery depends, not at all upon the acumen, but altogether upon the mere care, patience, and determination of the seekers; and where the case is of importance—or, when the reward is of magnitude

—the qualities in question have *never* been known to fail. You will now understand what I meant in suggesting that, had the purloined letter been hidden anywhere within the limits of the Prefect's examination—in other words, had the principle of its concealment been comprehended within the principles of the Prefect—its discovery would have been a matter altogether beyond question. This functionary, however, has been thoroughly mystified; and the remote source of his defeat lies in the supposition that the Minister is a fool, because he has acquired renown as a poet. All fools are poets; this the Prefect *feels;* and he is merely guilty of a *non distributio medii* in thence inferring that all poets are fools. I mean to say, that if the Minister had been no more than a mathematician, the Prefect would have been under no necessity of giving me this check. I knew him, however, as both mathematician and poet, and my measures were adapted to his capacity, with reference to the circumstances by which he was surrounded. I knew him as a courtier, too, and as a bold *intriguant.* Such a man, I considered, could not fail to be aware of the ordinary political modes of action. He could not have failed to anticipate—and events have proved that he did not fail to anticipate—the waylayings to which he was subjected. He must have foreseen, I reflected, the secret investigations of his premises. His frequent absences from home at night, which were hailed by the Prefect as certain aids to his success, I regarded only as *ruses,* to afford opportunity for thorough search to the police, and thus the sooner to impress them with the conviction to which G——, in fact, did finally arrive—the conviction that the letter was not upon the premises. I felt, also, that the whole train of thought, which I was at some pains in detailing to you just now, concerning the invariable principle of political action in searches for articles concealed—I felt that this

whole train of thought would necessarily pass through the mind of the Minister. It would imperatively lead him to despise all the ordinary *nooks* of concealment. *He* could not, I reflected, be so weak as not to see that the most intricate and remote recess of his hotel would be as open as his commonest closets to the eyes, to the probes, to the gimlets, and to the microscopes of the Prefect. I saw, in fine, that he would be driven, as a matter of course, to *simplicity*, if not deliberately induced to it as a matter of choice. You will remember, perhaps, how desperately the Prefect laughed when I suggested, upon our first interview, that it was just possible this mystery troubled him so much on account of its being so *very* self-evident."

"Yes," said I, "I remember his merriment well. I really thought he would have fallen into convulsions."

"The material world," continued Dupin, "abounds with very strict analogies to the immaterial; and thus some color of truth has been given to the rhetorical dogma that metaphor, or simile, may be made to strengthen an argument as well as to embellish a description. The principle of the *vis inertiae*, for example, seems to be identical in physics and metaphysics. It is not more true, in the former, that a large body is with more difficulty set in motion than a smaller one, and that its subsequent *momentum* is commensurate with this difficulty, than it is, in the latter, that intellects of the vaster capacity, while more forcible, more constant, and more eventful in their movements than those of inferior grade, are yet the less readily moved, and more embarrassed, and full of hesitation in the first few steps of their progress. Again: have you ever noticed which of the street signs, over the shop doors, are the most attractive of attention?"

"I have never given the matter a thought," I said.

"There is a game of puzzles," he resumed, "which is played upon a map. One party playing requires another to find a given word—the name of town, river, state, or empire—any word, in short, upon the motley and perplexed surface of the chart. A novice in the game generally seeks to embarrass his opponents by giving them the most minutely lettered names; but the adept selects such words as stretch, in large characters, from one end of the chart to the other. These, like the over-largely lettered signs and placards of the street, escape observation by dint of being excessively obvious; and here the physical oversight is precisely analogous with the moral inapprehension by which the intellect suffers to pass unnoticed those considerations which are too obtrusively and too palpably self-evident. But this is a point, it appears, somewhat above or beneath the understanding of the Prefect. He never once thought it probable, or possible, that the Minister had deposited the letter immediately beneath the nose of the whole world, by way of best preventing any portion of that world from perceiving it.

"But the more I reflected upon the daring, dashing, and discriminating ingenuity of D——; upon the fact that the document must always have been *at hand*, if he intended to use it to good purpose; and upon the decisive evidence, obtained by the Prefect, that it was not hidden within the limits of that dignitary's ordinary search, the more satisfied I became that, to conceal this letter, the Minister had resorted to the comprehensive and sagacious expedient of not attempting to conceal it.

"Full of these ideas, I prepared myself with a pair of green spectacles, and called one fine morning, quite by accident, at the Ministerial hotel. I found D—— at home, yawning, lounging, and dawdling, as usual, and pretending to be in the last extremity of *ennui*. He is, perhaps,

the most really energetic human being now alive—but that is only when nobody sees him.

"To be even with him, I complained of my weak eyes, and lamented the necessity of the spectacles, under cover of which I cautiously and thoroughly surveyed the whole apartment, while seemingly intent only upon the conversation of my host.

"I paid especial attention to a large writing-table near which he sat, and upon which lay confusedly some miscellaneous letters and other papers, with one or two musical instruments and a few books. Here, however, after a long and very deliberate scrutiny, I saw nothing to excite particular suspicion.

"At length my eyes, in going the circuit of the room, fell upon a trumpery filigree card-rack of pasteboard that hung dangling by a dirty blue ribbon from a little brass knob just beneath the middle of the mantelpiece. In this rack, which had three or four compartments, were five or six soiled cards and a solitary letter. This last was much soiled and crumpled. It was torn nearly in two, across the middle—as if a design, in the first instance, to tear it entirely up as worthless had been altered or stayed in the second. It had a large black seal, bearing the D—— cipher *very* conspicuously, and was addressed, in a diminutive female hand, to D——, the Minister, himself. It was thrust carelessly, and even, as it seemed, contemptuously, into one of the uppermost divisions of the rack.

"No sooner had I glanced at this letter than I concluded it to be that of which I was in search. To be sure, it was, to all appearance, radically different from the one of which the Prefect had read us so minute a description. Here the seal was large and black, with the D—— cipher; there it was small and red, with the ducal arms of the S—— family. Here the address, to the Minister, was diminutive and

feminine; there the superscription, to a certain royal personage, was markedly bold and decided; the size alone formed a point of correspondence. But, then, the *radicalness* of these differences, which was excessive; the dirt; the soiled and torn condition of the paper, so inconsistent with the *true* methodical habits of D——, and so consistent of a design to delude the beholder into an idea of the worthlessness of the document—these things, together with the hyperobtrusive situation of this document, full in the view of every visitor, and thus exactly in accordance with the conclusions to which I had previously arrived—these things, I say, were strongly corroborative of suspicion in one who came with the intention to suspect.

"I protracted my visit as long as possible, and, while I maintained a most animated discussion with the Minister upon a topic which I knew well had never failed to interest and excite him, I kept my attention riveted upon the letter. In this examination I committed to memory its external appearance and arrangement in the rack, and also fell, at length, upon a discovery which set at rest whatever trivial doubt I might have entertained. In scrutinizing the edges of the paper, I observed them to be more *chafed* than seemed necessary. They presented the *broken* appearance which is manifested when a stiff paper, having been once folded and pressed with a folder, is refolded in a reversed direction, in the same creases or edges which formed the original fold. This discovery was sufficient. It was clear to me that the letter had been turned, as a glove, inside out, re-directed and re-sealed. I bade the Minister good-morning, and took my departure at once, leaving a gold snuff-box upon the table.

"The next morning I called for the snuff-box, when we resumed, quite eagerly, the conversation of the preceding day. While thus engaged, however, a loud report, as if

of a pistol, was heard immediately beneath the windows of the hotel, and was succeeded by a series of fearful screams and the shoutings of a terrified mob. D—— rushed to a casement, threw it open, and looked out. In the mean time I stepped to the card-rack, took the letter, put it in my pocket, and replaced it by a *facsimile* (so far as regards externals), which I had carefully prepared at my lodgings—imitating the D—— cipher, very readily, by means of a seal formed of bread.

"The disturbance in the street had been occasioned by the frantic behavior of a man with a musket. He had fired it among a crowd of women and children. It proved, however, to have been without ball, and the fellow was suffered to go his way as a lunatic or a drunkard. When he had gone, D—— came from the window, whither I had followed him immediately upon securing the object in view. Soon afterward I bade him farewell. The pretended lunatic was a man in my own pay."

"But what purpose had you," I asked, "in replacing the letter by a *facsimile?* Would it not have been better, at the first visit, to have seized it openly and departed?"

"D——," replied Dupin, "is a desperate man and a man of nerve. His hotel, too, is not without attendants devoted to his interests. Had I made the wild attempt you suggest, I might never have left the Ministerial presence alive. The good people of Paris might have heard of me no more. But I had an object apart from these considerations. You know my political prepossessions. In this matter I act as a partisan of the lady concerned. For eighteen months the Minister has had her in his power. She has now him in hers—since, being unaware that the letter is not in his possession, he will proceed with his exactions as if it was. Thus will he inevitably commit himself, at once, to his political destruction. His down-

fall, too, will not be more precipitate than awkward. It is all very well to talk about the *facilis descensus Averni;* but in all kinds of climbing, as Catalani said of singing, it is far more easy to get up than to come down. In the present instance I have no sympathy—at least no pity—for him who descends. He is that *monstrum horrendum,* an unprincipled man of genius. I confess, however, that I should like very well to know the precise character of his thoughts, when, being defied by her whom the Prefect terms 'a certain personage,' he is reduced to opening the letter I left for him in the card-rack."

"How? Did you put anything particular in it?"

"Why—it did not seem altogether right to leave the interior blank—that would have been insulting. D——, at Vienna once, did me an evil turn, which I told him, quite good-humoredly, that I should remember. So, as I knew he would feel some curiosity in regard to the identity of the person who had outwitted him, I thought it a pity not to give him a clew. He is well acquainted with my MS., and I just copied into the middle of the blank sheet the words:

"'———

. . . Un dessein si funeste,
S'il n'est digne d'Atrée, este digne de Thyeste.'

They are to be found in Crébillon's *Atrée.*"

VII

RAB AND HIS FRIENDS

BY

Dr. John Brown (1810–1882)

MICHIGAN CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LIBRARY
ROCHESTER, MICHIGAN

Rab and His Friends

Dr. John Brown (1810–1882)

FOUR-AND-THIRTY years ago, Bob Ainslie and I were coming up Infirmary Street from the High School, our heads together, and our arms intertwisted as only lovers and boys know how or why.

When we got to the top of the street and turned north we espied a crowd at the Tron Church. "A dog-fight!" shouted Bob, and was off; and so was I, both of us all but praying that it might not be over before we got up! And is not this boy-nature, and human nature, too? And don't we all wish a house on fire not to be out before we see it? Dogs like fighting; old Isaac says they "delight" in it, and for the best of all reasons; and boys are not cruel because they like to see the fight. They see three of the great cardinal virtues of dog or man—courage, endurance, and skill—in intense action. This is very different from a love of making dogs fight, and aggravating and making gain by their pluck. A boy—be he ever so fond himself of fighting, if he be a good boy, hates and despises all this, but he would have run off with Bob and me fast enough; it is a natural, and a not wicked, interest that all boys and men have in witnessing intense energy in action.

Does any curious and finely ignorant woman wish to know how Bob's eye at a glance announced a dog-fight to his brain? He did not—he could not—see the dogs fighting;

it was a flash of an inference, a rapid induction. The crowd round a couple of dogs fighting is a crowd masculine mainly, with an occasional active, compassionate woman fluttering wildly round the outside, and using her tongue and her hands freely upon the men, as so many "brutes"; it is a crowd annular, compact, and mobile; a crowd centripetal, having its eyes and its heads all bent downward and inward to one common focus.

Well, Bob and I are up, and find it is not over; a small thoroughbred, white bull-terrier is busy throttling a large shepherd's dog, unaccustomed to war but not to be trifled with. They are hard at it; the scientific little fellow doing his work in great style, his pastoral enemy fighting wildly, but with the sharpest of teeth and a great courage. Science and breeding, however, soon had their own; the Game Chicken, as the premature Bob called him, working his way up, took his final grip of poor Yarrow's throat—and he lay gasping and done for. His master, a brown, handsome, big, young shepherd from Tweedsmuir, would have liked to have knocked down any man, would "drink up Esil, or eat a crocodile," for that part, if he had a chance; it was no use kicking the little dog; that would only make him hold the closer. Many were the means shouted out in mouthfuls of the best possible ways of ending it. "Water!" but there was none near, and many cried for it who might have got it from the well at Blackfriar's Wynd. "Bite the tail!" and a large, vague, benevolent, middle-aged man, more desirous than wise, with some struggle got the bushy end of Yarrow's tail into his ample mouth and bit it with all his might. This was more than enough for the much-enduring, much-perspiring shepherd, who, with a gleam of joy over his broad visage, delivered a terrific facer upon our large, vague, benevolent, middle-aged friend, who went down like a shot.

Still the Chicken holds; death not far off. "Snuff! a pinch of snuff!" observed a calm, highly dressed young buck with an eye-glass in his eye. "Snuff, indeed!" growled the angry crowd, affronted and glaring. "Snuff! a pinch of snuff!" again observes the buck, but with more urgency; whereon were produced several open boxes, and from a mull which may have been at Culloden he took a pinch, knelt down, and presented it to the nose of the Chicken. The laws of physiology and of snuff take their course; the Chicken sneezes, and Yarrow is free!

The young pastoral giant stalks off with Yarrow in his arms—comforting him.

But the bull-terrier's blood is up, and his soul unsatisfied; he grips the first dog he meets, and, discovering she is not a dog, in Homeric phrase, he makes a brief sort of *amende* and is off. The boys, with Bob and me at their head, are after him: down Niddry Street he goes, bent on mischief; up the Cowgate like an arrow—Bob and I, and our small men, panting behind.

There, under the single arch of the South Bridge, is a huge mastiff, sauntering down the middle of the causeway, as if with his hands in his pockets; he is old, brindled, as big as a little Highland bull, and has the Shakespearean dewlaps shaking as he goes.

The Chicken makes straight at him, and fastens on his throat. To our astonishment, the great creature does nothing but stand still, hold himself up, and roar—yes, roar, a long, serious, remonstrative roar. How is this? Bob and I are up to them. *He is muzzled!* The bailies had proclaimed a general muzzling, and his master, studying strength and economy mainly, had encompassed his huge jaws in a home-made apparatus constructed out of the leather of some ancient *breechin.* His mouth was open as far as it could; his lips curled up in rage—a sort of terrible grin;

his teeth gleaming, ready, from out the darkness; the strap across his mouth tense as a bowstring; his whole frame stiff with indignation and surprise; his roar asking us all round, "Did you ever see the like of this?" He looked a statue of anger and astonishment done in Aberdeen granite.

We soon had a crowd; the Chicken held on. "A knife!" cried Bob; and a cobbler gave him his knife; you know the kind of knife, worn obliquely to a point and always keen. I put its edge to the tense leather; it ran before it; and then!—one sudden jerk of that enormous head, a sort of dirty mist about his mouth, no noise, and the bright and fierce little fellow is dropped, limp and dead. A solemn pause; this was more than any of us had bargained for. I turned the little fellow over, and saw he was quite dead: the mastiff had taken him by the small of the back like a rat and broken it.

He looked down at his victim appeased, ashamed, and amazed; sniffed him all over, stared at him, and, taking a sudden thought, turned round and trotted off. Bob took the dead dog up, and said, "John, we'll bury him after tea." "Yes," said I, and was off after the mastiff. He made up the Cowgate at a rapid swing; he had forgotten some engagement. He turned up the Candlemaker Row, and stopped at the Harrow Inn.

There was a carrier's cart ready to start, and a keen, thin, impatient, black-a-vised little man, his hand at his gray horse's head, looking about angrily for something. "Rab, ye thief!" said he, aiming a kick at my great friend, who drew cringing up, and, avoiding the heavy shoe with more agility than dignity and watching his master's eye, slunk dismayed under the cart—his ears down, and as much as he had of tail down, too.

What a man this must be—thought I—to whom my

tremendous hero turns tail! The carrier saw the muzzle hanging, cut and useless, from his neck, and I eagerly told him the story, which Bob and I always thought, and still think, Homer, or King David, or Sir Walter alone were worthy to rehearse. The severe little man was mitigated, and condescended to say, "Rab, ma man—puir Rabbie," whereupon the stump of a tail rose up, the ears were cocked, the eyes filled and were comforted; the two friends were reconciled. "Hupp!" and a stroke of the whip were given to Jess, and off went the three.

Bob and I buried the Game Chicken that night (we had not much of a tea) in the back-green of his house, in Melville Street, No. 17, with considerable gravity and silence; and being at the time in the Iliad, and, like all boys, Trojans, we of course called him Hector.

Six years have passed—a long time for a boy and a dog; Bob Ainslie is off to the wars; I am a medical student, and clerk at Minto House Hospital.

Rab I saw almost every week, on the Wednesday, and we had much pleasant intimacy. I found the way to his heart by frequent scratching of his huge head and an occasional bone. When I did not notice him he would plant himself straight before me and stand wagging that bud of a tail, and looking up, with his head a little to the one side. His master I occasionally saw; he used to call me "Maister John," but was laconic as any Spartan.

One fine October afternoon I was leaving the hospital, when I saw the large gate open, and in walked Rab, with that great and easy saunter of his. He looked as if taking possession of the place, like the Duke of Wellington entering a subdued city, satiated with victory and peace. After him came Jess, now white from age, with her cart; and in it a woman carefully wrapped up—the carrier leading the horse anxiously and looking back. When he saw me,

James (for his name was James Noble) made a curt and grotesque "boo," and said, "Maister John, this is the mistress; she's got a trouble in her breest—some kind o' an income, we're thinkin'."

By this time I saw the woman's face; she was sitting on a sack filled with straw, with her husband's plaid round her, and his big-coat, with its large, white metal buttons, over her feet.

I never saw a more unforgettable face—pale, serious, *lonely*, delicate, sweet, without being at all what we call fine. She looked sixty, and had on a mutch, white as snow, with its black ribbon; her silvery, smooth hair setting off her dark-gray eyes—eyes such as one sees only twice or thrice in a lifetime, full of suffering, full also of the overcoming of it; her eyebrows black and delicate, and her mouth firm, patient, and contented, which few mouths ever are.

As I have said, I never saw a more beautiful countenance, or one more subdued to settled quiet. "Ailie," said James, "this is Maister John, the young doctor; Rab's friend, ye ken. We often speak aboot you, doctor." She smiled and made a movement, but said nothing, and prepared to come down, putting her plaid aside and rising. Had Solomon, in all his glory, been handing down the Queen of Sheba at his palace gate, he could not have done it more daintily, more tenderly, more like a gentleman than James, the Howland carrier, when he lifted down Ailie, his wife. The contrast of his small, swarthy, weather-beaten, keen, worldly face to hers—pale, subdued, and beautiful—was something wonderful. Rab looked on concerned and puzzled, but ready for anything that might turn up, were it to strangle the nurse, the porter, or even me. Ailie and he seemed great friends.

"As I was sayin', she's got a kind o' trouble in her

breest, doctor; wull ye tak' a look at it?" We walked into the consulting-room, all four; Rab, grim and comic, willing to be happy and confidential if cause should be shown, willing also to be the reverse on the same terms. Ailie sat down, undid her open gown and her lawn handkerchief round her neck, and, without a word, showed me her right breast. I looked at it and examined it carefully, she and James watching me, and Rab eying all three. What could I say? There it was, that had once been so soft, so shapely, so white, so gracious and bountiful, so "full of all blessed condition," hard as a stone, a centre of horrid pain, making that pale face, with its gray, lucid, reasonable eyes, and its sweet, resolved mouth, express the full measure of suffering overcome. Why was that gentle, modest, sweet woman, clean and lovable, condemned by God to bear such a burden?

I got her away to bed. "May Rab and me bide?" said James. "*You* may; and Rab, if he will behave himself." "I'se warrant he's do that, doctor." And in slunk the faithful beast. There are no such dogs now. He belonged to a lost tribe. As I have said, he was brindled, and gray like Rubislaw granite; his hair short, hard, and close, like a lion's; his body thick-set, like a little bull—a sort of compressed Hercules of a dog. He must have been ninety pounds' weight, at the least; he had a large, blunt head; his muzzle black as night; his mouth blacker than any night; a tooth or two—being all he had—gleaming out of his jaws of darkness. His head was scarred with the records of old wounds, a sort of series of fields of battles all over it; one eye out, one ear cropped as close as was Archbishop Leighton's father's; the remaining eye had the power of two; and above it, and in constant communication with it, was a tattered rag of an ear, which was forever unfurling itself, like an old flag; and then that bud

of a tail, about one inch long, if it could in any sense be said to be long, being as broad as long—the mobility, the instantaneousness of that bud were very funny and surprising, and its expressive twinklings and winkings, the intercommunications between the eye, the ear, and it, were of the oddest and swiftest.

Rab had the dignity and simplicity of great size; and, having fought his way all along the road to absolute supremacy, he was as mighty in his own line as Julius Cæsar or the Duke of Wellington, and had the gravity of all great fighters.

You must have often observed the likeness of certain men to certain animals, and of certain dogs to men. Now, I never looked at Rab without thinking of the great Baptist preacher, Andrew Fuller. The same large, heavy, menacing, combative, sombre, honest countenance, the same deep, inevitable eye; the same look, as of thunder asleep, but ready—neither a dog nor a man to be trifled with.

Next day my master, the surgeon, examined Ailie. There could be no doubt it must kill her, and soon. If it could be removed—it might never return—it would give her speedy relief—she should have it done. She curtsied, looked at James, and said, "When?" "To-morrow," said the kind surgeon—a man of few words. She and James and Rab and I retired. I noticed that he and she spoke little, but seemed to anticipate everything in each other. The following day, at noon, the students came in, hurrying up the great stair. At the first landing-place, on a small, well-known blackboard, was a bit of paper fastened by wafers, and many remains of old wafers beside it. On the paper were the words:

"An operation to-day.—J. B., *Clerk*."

Up ran the youths, eager to secure good places; in they crowded, full of interest and talk. "What's the case?" "Which side is it?"

Don't think them heartless; they are neither better nor worse than you or I; they get over their professional horrors, and into their proper work; and in them pity, as an *emotion*, ending in itself or at best in tears and a long-drawn breath, lessens, while pity, as a *motive*, is quickened, and gains power and purpose. It is well for poor human nature that it is so.

The operating-theatre is crowded; much talk and fun, and all the cordiality and stir of youth. The surgeon with his staff of assistants is there. In comes Ailie; one look at her quiets and abates the eager students. That beautiful old woman is too much for them; they sit down, and are dumb, and gaze at her. These rough boys feel the power of her presence. She walks in quietly, but without haste; dressed in her mutch, her neckerchief, her white dimity short-gown, her black bombazeen petticoat, showing her white worsted stockings and her carpet shoes. Behind her was James with Rab. James sat down in the distance, and took that huge and noble head between his knees. Rab looked perplexed and dangerous—forever cocking his ear and dropping it as fast.

Ailie stepped up on a seat, and laid herself on the table, as her friend the surgeon told her; arranged herself, gave a rapid look at James, shut her eyes, rested herself on me, and took my hand. The operation was at once begun; it was necessarily slow; and chloroform—one of God's best gifts to his suffering children—was then unknown. The surgeon did his work. The pale face showed its pain, but was still and silent. Rab's soul was working within him; he saw something strange was going on, blood flowing from his mistress, and she suffering; his ragged ear was up and

importunate; he growled and gave now and then a sharp, impatient yelp; he would have liked to have done something to that man. But James had him firm, and gave him a *glower* from time to time, and an intimation of a possible kick; all the better for James—it kept his eye and his mind off Ailie.

It is over; she is dressed, steps gently and decently down from the table, looks for James; then turning to the surgeon and the students, she curtsies, and in a low, clear voice, begs their pardon if she has behaved ill. The students—all of us—wept like children; the surgeon wrapped her up carefully, and, resting on James and me, Ailie went to her room, and Rab followed. We put her to bed. James took off his heavy shoes, crammed with tackets, heel-capped and toe-capped, and put them carefully under the table, saying: "Maister John, I'm for nane o' yer strynge nurse bodies for Ailie. I'll be her nurse, and I'll gang aboot on my stockin' soles as canny as pussy." And so he did; and handy and clever, and swift and tender as any woman was that horny-handed, snell, peremptory little man. Everything she got he gave her; he seldom slept; and often I saw his small, shrewd eyes out of the darkness, fixed on her. As before, they spoke little.

Rab behaved well, never moving, showing us how meek and gentle he could be, and occasionally, in his sleep, letting us know that he was demolishing some adversary. He took a walk with me every day, generally to the Candlemaker Row; but he was sombre and mild; declined doing battle, though some fit cases offered, and indeed submitted to sundry indignities; and was always very ready to turn, and came faster back, and trotted up the stair with much lightness, and went straight to that door.

Jess, the mare, had been sent, with her weather-beaten cart, to Howgate, and had doubtless her own dim and placid

meditations and confusions on the absence of her master and Rab and her unnatural freedom from the road and her cart.

For some days Ailie did well. The wound healed "by the first intention"; for as James said, "Oor Ailie's skin's ower clean to beil." The students came in quiet and anxious, and surrounded her bed. She said she liked to see their young, honest faces. The surgeon dressed her, and spoke to her in his own short, kind way, pitying her through his eyes, Rab and James outside the circle—Rab being now reconciled, and even cordial, and having made up his mind that as yet nobody required worrying, but, as you may suppose, *semper paratus*.

So far well; but, four days after the operation, my patient had a sudden and long shivering, a "groosin," as she called it. I saw her soon after; her eyes were too bright, her cheek colored; she was restless, and ashamed of being so; the balance was lost; mischief had begun. On looking at the wound a blush of red told the secret; her pulse was rapid, her breathing anxious and quick; she wasn't herself, as she said, and was vexed at her restlessness. We tried what we could. James did everything, was everywhere, never in the way, never out of it; Rab subsided under the table into a dark place, and was motionless, all but his eye, which followed every one. Ailie got worse; began to wander in her mind, gently; was more demonstrative in her ways to James, rapid in her questions, and sharp at times. He was vexed, and said, "She was never that way afore, no, never." For a time she knew her head was wrong, and was always asking our pardon—the dear, gentle old woman; then delirium set in strong, without pause. Her brain gave way, and then came that terrible spectacle,

> "The intellectual power, through words and things,
> Went sounding on. a dim and perilous way";

she sang bits of old songs and Psalms, stopping suddenly, mingling the Psalms of David and the diviner words of his Son and Lord with homely odds and ends of ballads.

Nothing more touching, or in a sense more strangely beautiful, did I ever witness. Her tremulous, rapid, affectionate, eager, Scotch voice—the swift, aimless, bewildered mind, the baffled utterance, the bright and perilous eye; some wild words, some household cares, something for James, the names of the dead, Rab called rapidly and in a "fremyt" voice, and he starting up, surprised, and slinking off as if he were to blame somehow, or had been dreaming he heard. Many eager questions and beseechings which James and I could make nothing of, and on which she seemed to set her all, and then sink back ununderstood. It was very sad, but better than many things that are not called sad. James hovered about, put out and miserable, but active and exact as ever; read to her, when there was a lull, short bits from the Psalms, prose and metre, chanting the latter in his own rude and serious way, showing great knowledge of the fit words, bearing up like a man, and doating over her as his "ain Ailie." "Ailie, ma woman!" "Ma ain bonnie wee dawtie!"

The end was drawing on; the golden bowl was breaking; the silver cord was fast being loosed—that *animula, blandula, vagula, hospes, comesque,* was about to flee. The body and the soul—companions for sixty years—were being sundered and taking leave. She was walking, alone, through the valley of that shadow into which one day we must all enter—and yet she was not alone, for we know whose rod and staff were comforting her.

One night she had fallen quiet, and, as we hoped, asleep; her eyes were shut. We put down the gas, and sat watching her. Suddenly she sat up in bed, and, taking a bedgown which was lying on it rolled up, she held it eagerly

to her breast—to the right side. We could see her eyes bright with a surprising tenderness and joy, bending over this bundle of clothes. She held it as a woman holds her sucking child; opening out her night-gown impatiently, and holding it close and brooding over it and murmuring foolish little words, as over one whom his mother comforteth, and who sucks and is satisfied. It was pitiful and strange to see her wasted, dying look, keen and yet vague —her immense love.

"Preserve me!" groaned James, giving way. And then she rocked back and forward, as if to make it sleep, hushing it, and wasting on it her infinite fondness. "Wae's me, doctor; I declare she's thinkin' it's that bairn." "What bairn?" "The only bairn we ever had; our wee Mysie, and she's in the Kingdom forty years and mair." It was plainly true; the pain in the breast, telling its urgent story to a bewildered, ruined brain, was misread and mistaken; it suggested to her the uneasiness of a breast full of milk, and then the child; and so again once more they were together, and she had her ain wee Mysie on her bosom.

This was the close. She sank rapidly; the delirium left her; but, as she whispered, she was "clean silly"; it was the lightening before the final darkness. After having for some time lain still, her eyes shut, she said, "James!" He came close to her, and, lifting up her calm, clear, beautiful eyes, she gave him a long look, turned to me kindly but shortly, looked for Rab but could not see him, then turned to her husband again, as if she would never leave off looking, shut her eyes, and composed herself. She lay for some time breathing quick, and passed away so gently that, when we thought she was gone, James, in his old-fashioned way, held the mirror to her face. After a long pause, one small spot of dimness was breathed out; it vanished away, and never returned,

leaving the blank, clear darkness without a stain. "What is our life? It is even as a vapor, which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."

Rab all this time had been full awake and motionless; he came forward beside us; Ailie's hand, which James had held, was hanging down; it was soaked with his tears; Rab licked it all over carefully, looked at her, and returned to his place under the table.

James and I sat, I don't know how long, but for some time. Saying nothing, he started up abruptly, and with some noise went to the table, and, putting his right fore and middle fingers each into a shoe, pulled them out and put them on, breaking one of the leather latchets, and muttering in anger, "I never did the like o' that afore!"

I believe he never did; nor after either. "Rab!" he said, roughly, and, pointing with his thumb to the bottom of the bed. Rab leaped up and settled himself, his head and eye to the dead face. "Maister John, ye'll wait for me," said the carrier; and disappeared in the darkness, thundering down-stairs in his heavy shoes. I ran to a front window; there he was, already round the house and out at the gate, fleeing like a shadow.

I was afraid about him, and yet not afraid; so I sat down beside Rab, and, being wearied, fell asleep. I awoke from a sudden noise outside. It was November, and there had been a heavy fall of snow. Rab was *in statu quo;* he heard the noise, too, and plainly knew it, but never moved. I looked out; and there, at the gate, in the dim morning—for the sun was not up—was Jess and the cart, a cloud of steam rising from the old mare. I did not see James; he was already at the door, and came up the stairs and met me. It was less than three hours since he left, and he must have posted out—who knows how?—to Howgate, full nine miles off, yoked Jess, and driven her astonished

into town. He had an armful of blankets, and was streaming with perspiration. He nodded to me, and spread out on the floor two pairs of clean old blankets having at their corners, "A. G., 1794," in large letters in red worsted. These were the initials of Alison Graeme, and James may have looked in at her from without—himself unseen but not unthought of—when he was "wat, wat, and weary," and, after having walked many a mile over the hills, may have seen her sitting, while "a' the lave were sleeping," and by the firelight working her name on the blankets for her ain James's bed.

He motioned Rab down, and, taking his wife in his arms, laid her in the blankets, and happed her carefully and firmly up, leaving the face uncovered; and then, lifting her, he nodded again sharply to me, and with a resolved but utterly miserable face strode along the passage and down-stairs, followed by Rab. I followed with a light; but he didn't need it. I went out, holding stupidly the candle in my hand in the calm, frosty air; we were soon at the gate. I could have helped him, but I saw he was not to be meddled with, and he was strong, and did not need it. He laid her down as tenderly, as safely, as he had lifted her out ten days before—as tenderly as when he had her first in his arms when she was only "A. G."—sorted her, leaving that beautiful sealed face open to the heavens; and then, taking Jess by the head, he moved away. He did not notice me, neither did Rab, who presided behind the cart.

I stood till they passed through the long shadow of the College and turned up Nicolson Street. I heard the solitary cart sound through the streets, and die away and come again; and I returned, thinking of that company going up Libberton Brae, then along Roslin Muir, the morning light touching the Pentlands, and making them

like onlooking ghosts; then down the hill through Auchindinny woods, past "haunted Woodhouselee"; and as daybreak came sweeping up the bleak Lammermuirs, and fell on his own door, the company would stop, and James would take the key, and lift Ailie up again, laying her on her own bed, and, having put Jess up, would return with Rab and shut the door.

James buried his wife, with his neighbors mourning, Rab watching the proceedings from a distance. It was snow, and that black, ragged hole would look strange in the midst of the swelling, spotless cushion of white. James looked after everything; then rather suddenly fell ill, and took to bed; was insensible when the doctor came, and soon died. A sort of low fever was prevailing in the village, and his want of sleep, his exhaustion, and his misery made him apt to take it. The grave was not difficult to reopen. A fresh fall of snow had again made all things white and smooth; Rab once more looked on, and slunk home to the stable.

And what of Rab? I asked for him next week at the new carrier who got the good-will of James's business and was now master of Jess and her cart. "How's Rab?" He put me off, and said, rather rudely, "What's *your* business wi' the dowg?" I was not to be so put off. "Where's Rab?" He, getting confused and red, and intermeddling with his hair, said, "'Deed, sir, Rab's deid." "Dead! What did he die of?" "Weel, sir," said he, getting redder, "he didna' exactly dee; he was killed. I had to brain him wi' a rack-pin; there was nae doin' wi' him. He lay in the treviss wi' the mear, and wadna come oot. I tempit him wi' kail and meat, but he wad tak naething, and keepit me frae feeding the beast, and he was aye gurrin', and grup, gruppin' me by the legs. I was laith to mak' awa' wi' the auld dowg, his like wasna atween this

and Thornhill—but, 'deed, sir, I could do naething else." I believed him. Fit end for Rab, quick and complete. His teeth and his friends gone, why should he keep the peace and be civil?

He was buried in the braeface, near the burn, the children of the village, his companions, who used to make very free with him and sit on his ample stomach as he lay half asleep at the door in the sun, watching the solemnity.

VIII

THE BOOTS AT THE HOLLY-TREE INN

BY

Charles Dickens (1812–1870)

The Boots at the Holly-Tree Inn

Charles Dickens (1812–1870)

WHERE had he been in his time? he repeated, when I asked him the question. Lord, he had been everywhere! And what had he been? Bless you, he had been everything you could mention, a'most!

Seen a good deal? Why, of course he had. I should say so, he could assure me, if I only knew about a twentieth part of what had come in *his* way. Why, it would be easier for him, he expected, to tell what he hadn't seen than what he had. Ah! a deal, it would.

What was the curiousest thing he had seen? Well! He didn't know. He couldn't momently name what was the curiousest thing he had seen—unless it was a Unicorn—and he see *him* once at a fair. But supposing a young gentleman not eight year old was to run away with a fine young woman of seven, might I think *that* a queer start? Certainly. Then that was a start as he himself had had his blessed eyes on, and he had cleaned the shoes they run away in—and they was so little he couldn't get his hand into 'em.

Master Harry Walmers' father, you see, he lived at the Elmses, down away by Shooter's Hill there, six or seven miles from Lunnon. He was a gentleman of spirit, and good-looking, and held his head up when he walked, and had what you call Fire about him. He wrote poetry, and he rode, and he ran, and he cricketed, and he danced, and

he acted, and he done it all equally beautiful. He was uncommon proud of Master Harry as was his only child; but he didn't spoil him neither. He was a gentleman that had a will of his own and a eye of his own, and that would be minded. Consequently, though he made quite a companion of the fine bright boy, and was delighted to see him so fond of reading his fairy-books, and was never tired of hearing him say my name is Norval, or hearing him sing his songs about Young May Moons is beaming love, and When he as adores thee has left but the name, and that; still he kept the command over the child, and the child *was* a child, and it's to be wished more of 'em was.

How did Boots happen to know all this? Why, through being under-gardener. Of course he couldn't be under-gardener, and he always about, in the summer-time, near the windows on the lawn, a-mowing, and sweeping, and weeding, and pruning, and this and that, without getting acquainted with the ways of the family. Even supposing Master Harry hadn't come to him one morning early, and said, "Cobbs, how should you spell Norah, if you was asked?" and then began cutting it in print all over the fence.

He couldn't say that he had taken particular notice of children before that; but really it was pretty to see them two mites a-going about the place together, deep in love. And the courage of the boy! Bless your soul, he'd have throwed off his little hat, and tucked up his little sleeves, and gone in at a lion, he would, if they had happened to meet one, and she had been frightened of him. One day he stops, along with her, where Boots was hoeing weeds in the gravel, and says, speaking up, "Cobbs," he says, "I like *you*." "Do you, sir? I'm proud to hear it." "Yes, I do, Cobbs. Why do I like you, do you think, Cobbs?" "Don't know, Master Harry, I am sure." "Because Norah

likes you, Cobbs." "Indeed, sir? That's very gratifying." "Gratifying, Cobbs? It's better than millions of the brightest diamonds to be liked by Norah." "Certainly, sir." "Would you like another situation, Cobbs?" "Well, sir, I shouldn't object if it was a good 'un." "Then, Cobbs," says he, "you shall be our Head Gardener when we are married." And he tucks her, in her little sky-blue mantle, under his arm, and walks away.

Boots could assure me that it was better than a picter, and equal to a play, to see them babies, with their long, bright, curling hair, their sparkling eyes, and their beautiful light tread, a-rambling about the garden, deep in love. Boots was of opinion that the birds believed they was birds, and kept up with 'em, singing to please 'em. Sometimes they would creep under the tulip-tree, and would sit there with their arms round one another's necks, and their soft cheeks touching, a-reading about the Prince and the Dragon, and the good and bad enchanters, and the king's fair daughter. Sometimes he would hear them planning about a house in a forest, keeping bees and a cow, and living entirely on milk and honey. Once he came upon them by the pond, and heard Master Harry say, "Adorable Norah, kiss me, and say you love me to distraction, or I'll jump in head foremost." And Boots made no question he would have done it if she hadn't complied. On the whole, Boots said it had a tendency to make him feel he was in love himself—only he didn't exactly know who with.

"Cobbs," said Master Harry, one evening, when Cobbs was watering the flowers, "I am going on a visit, this present midsummer, to my grandmamma's at York."

"Are you, indeed, sir? I hope you'll have a pleasant time. I am going into Yorkshire, myself, when I leave here."

"Are you going to your grandmamma's, Cobbs?"

"No, sir. I haven't got such a thing."

"Not as a grandmamma, Cobbs?"

"No, sir."

The boy looked on at the watering of the flowers for a little while, and then said, "I shall be very glad indeed to go, Cobbs—Norah's going."

"You'll be all right, then, sir," says Cobbs, "with your beautiful sweetheart by your side."

"Cobbs," returned the boy, flushing, "I never let anybody joke about it when I can prevent them."

"It wasn't a joke, sir," says Cobbs, with humility—"wasn't so meant."

"I am glad of that, Cobbs, because I like you, you know, and you're going to live with us. Cobbs!"

"Sir."

"What do you think my grandmamma gives me when I go down there?"

"I couldn't so much as make a guess, sir."

"A Bank-of-England five-pound note, Cobbs."

"Whew!" says Cobbs, "that's a spanking sum of money, Master Harry."

"A person could do a great deal with such a sum of money as that—couldn't a person, Cobbs?"

"I believe you, sir!"

"Cobbs," said the boy, "I'll tell you a secret. At Norah's house they have been joking her about me, and pretending to laugh at our being engaged—pretending to make game of it, Cobbs!"

"Such, sir," says Cobbs, "is the depravity of human natur'."

The boy, looking exactly like his father, stood for a few minutes with his glowing face toward the sunset, and then departed with, "Good-night, Cobbs. I'm going in."

If I was to ask Boots how it happened that he was

a-going to leave that place just at that present time, well, he couldn't rightly answer me. He did suppose he might have stayed there till now if he had been anyways inclined. But you see, he was younger then, and he wanted change. That's what he wanted—change. Mr. Walmers, he said to him when he gave him notice of his intentions to leave, "Cobbs," he says, "have you anythink to complain of? I make the inquiry, because if I find that any of my people really has anythink to complain of, I wish to make it right if I can." "No, sir," says Cobbs; "thanking you, sir, I find myself as well sitiwated here as I could hope to be anywheres. The truth is, sir, that I'm a-going to seek my fortun'." "Oh, indeed, Cobbs!" he says; "I hope you may find it." And Boots could assure me—which he did, touching his hair with his bootjack, as a salute in the way of his present calling—that he hadn't found it yet.

Well, sir! Boots left the Elmses when his time was up, and Master Harry, he went down to the old lady's at York, which old lady would have given that child the teeth out of her head (if she had had any), she was so wrapped up in him. What does that Infant do—for Infant you may call him, and be within the mark—but cut away from that old lady's with his Norah, on a expedition to go to Gretna Green and be married!

Sir, Boots was at this identical Holly-Tree Inn (having left it several times to better himself, but always come back through one thing or another), when, one summer afternoon, the coach drives up, and out of the coach gets them two children. The Guard says to our Governor, "I don't quite make out these little passengers, but the young gentleman's words was, that they was to be brought here." The young gentleman gets out; hands his lady out; gives the Guard something for himself; says to our Governor, "We're to stop here to-night, please. Sitting-room and

two bedrooms will be required. Chops and cherry-pudding for two!" and tucks her in her little sky-blue mantle, under his arm, and walks into the house much bolder than Brass.

Boots leaves me to judge what the amazement of that establishment was, when these two tiny creatures all alone by themselves was marched into the Angel—much more so when he, who had seen them without their seeing him, give the Governor his views upon the expedition they was upon. "Cobbs," says the Governor, "if this is so, I must set off myself to York, and quiet their friends' minds. In which case you must keep your eye upon 'em, and humor 'em till I come back. But before I take these measures, Cobbs, I should wish you to find from themselves whether your opinions is correct." "Sir, to you," says Cobbs, "that shall be done directly."

So Boots goes up-stairs to the Angel, and there he finds Master Harry, on a e'normous sofa—immense at any time, but looking like the Great Bed of Ware, compared with him—a-drying the eyes of Miss Norah with his pocket-hankecher. Their little legs was entirely off the ground, of course, and it really is not possible for Boots to express to me how small them children looked.

"It's Cobbs! It's Cobbs!" cries Master Harry, and comes running to him on t'other side, and catching hold of his t'other hand, and they both jump for joy.

"I see you a-getting out, sir," says Cobbs. "I thought it was you. I thought I couldn't be mistaken in your height and figure. What's the object of your journey, sir? Matrimonial?"

"We're going to be married, Cobbs, at Gretna Green," returned the boy. "We have run away on purpose. Norah has been in rather low spirits, Cobbs; but she'll be happy, now we have found you to be our friend."

"Thank you, sir, and thank *you*, miss," says Cobbs, "for your good opinion. *Did* you bring any luggage with you, sir?"

If I will believe Boots when he gives me his word and honor upon it, the lady had got a parasol, a smelling-bottle, a round and a half of cold buttered toast, eight peppermint drops, and a hair-brush—seemingly a doll's. The gentleman had got about half a dozen yards of string, a knife, three or four sheets of writing-paper, folded up surprising small, a orange, and a Chaney mug with his name upon it.

"What may be the exact nature of your plans, sir?" says Cobbs.

"To go on," replied the boy—which the courage of that boy was something wonderful!—"in the morning, and be married to-morrow."

"Just so, sir," says Cobbs. "Would it meet your views, sir, if I was to accompany you?"

When Cobbs said this, they both jumped for joy again, and cried out, "Oh yes, yes, Cobbs! Yes!"

"Well, sir!" says Cobbs. "If you will excuse me having the freedom to give an opinion, what I should recommend would be this. I am acquainted with a pony, sir, which, put in a pheayton that I could borrow, would take you and Mrs. Harry Walmers, Junior (myself driving, if you approved), to the end of your journey in a very short space of time. I am not altogether sure, sir, that this pony will be at liberty to-morrow, but even if you had to wait over to-morrow for him, it might be worth your while. As to the small account here, sir, in case you was to find yourself running at all short, that don't signify; because I am a part proprietor of this inn, and it could stand over."

Boots assures me that when they clapped their hands, and jumped for joy again, and called him "Good Cobbs!" and "Dear Cobbs!" and bent across him to kiss one another

in the delight of their confiding hearts, he felt himself the meanest rascal for deceiving 'em that ever was born.

"Is there anything you want just at present, sir?" says Cobbs, mortally ashamed of himself.

"We should like some cakes after dinner," answered Master Harry, folding his arms, putting out one leg, and looking straight at him, "and two apples and jam. With dinner we should like to have toast and water. But Norah has always been accustomed to half a glass of currant wine at dessert. And so have I."

"It shall be ordered at the bar, sir," says Cobbs; and away he went.

Boots has the feeling as fresh upon him this moment of speaking as he had then, that he would far rather have had it out in half a dozen rounds with the Governor than have combined with him; and that he wished with all his heart there was any impossible place where two babies could make an impossible marriage, and live impossibly happy ever afterward. However, as it couldn't be, he went into the Governor's plans, and the Governor set off for York in half an hour.

The way in which the women of that house—without exception—every one of 'em—married *and* single—took to that boy when they heard the story, Boots considers surprising. It was as much as he could do to keep 'em from dashing into the room and kissing him. They climbed up all sorts of places, at the risk of their lives, to look at him through a pane of glass. They was seven deep at the keyhole. They was out of their minds about him and his bold spirit.

In the evening, Boots went into the room to see how the runaway couple was getting on. The gentleman was on the window-seat, supporting the lady in his arms. She had tears upon her face, and was lying, very tired and half asleep, with her head upon his shoulder.

"Mrs. Harry Walmers, Junior, fatigued, sir?" says Cobbs.

"Yes, she is tired, Cobbs; but she is not used to be away from home, and she has been in low spirits again. Cobbs, do you think you could bring a biffin, please?"

"I ask your pardon, sir," says Cobbs. "What was it you—"

"I think a Norfolk biffin would rouse her, Cobbs. She is very fond of them."

Boots withdrew in search of the required restorative, and, when he brought it in, the gentleman handed it to the lady, and fed her with a spoon, and took a little himself; the lady being heavy with sleep, and rather cross. "What should you think, sir," says Cobbs, "of a chamber candlestick?" The gentleman approved; the chambermaid went first, up the great staircase; the lady, in her sky-blue mantle, followed, gallantly escorted by the gentleman; the gentleman embraced her at her door, and retired to his own apartment, where Boots softly locked him in.

Boots couldn't but feel with increased acuteness what a base deceiver he was, when they consulted him at breakfast (they had ordered sweet milk-and-water, and toast and currant jelly, over-night) about the pony. It really was as much as he could do, he don't mind confessing to me, to look them two young things in the face, and think what a wicked old father of lies he had grown up to be. Howsomever, he went on a-lying like a Trojan about the pony. He told 'em that it did so unfortunately happen that the pony was half clipped, you see, and that he couldn't be taken out in that state, for fear it should strike to his inside. But that he'd be finished clipping in the course of the day, and that to-morrow morning at eight o'clock the pheayton would be ready. Boots' view of the whole case, looking back on it in my room, is, that Mrs. Harry Walmers, Junior, was beginning to give in. She hadn't had her hair curled

when she went to bed, and she didn't seem quite up to brushing it herself, and its getting in her eyes put her out. But nothing put out Master Harry. He sat behind his breakfast-cup, a-tearing away at the jelly, as if he had been his own father.

After breakfast Boots is inclined to consider they drawed soldiers—at least he knows that many such was found in the fireplace, all on horseback. In the course of the morning Master Harry rang the bell—it was surprising how that there boy did carry on—and said, in a sprightly way, "Cobbs, is there any good walks in this neighborhood?"

"Yes, sir," says Cobbs. "There's Love Lane."

"Get out with you, Cobbs!"—that was that there boy's expression—"you're joking."

"Begging your pardon, sir," says Cobbs, "there *really is* Love Lane. And a pleasant walk it is, and proud shall I be to show it to yourself and Mrs. Harry Walmers, Junior."

"Norah, dear," says Master Harry, "this is curious. We really ought to see Love Lane. Put on your bonnet, my sweetest darling, and we will go there with Cobbs."

Boots leaves me to judge what a Beast he felt himself to be, when that young pair told him, as they all three jogged along together, that they had made up their minds to give him two thousand guineas a year as Head Gardener, on account of his being so true a friend to 'em. Boots could have wished at the moment that the earth would have opened and swallowed him up, he felt so mean, with their beaming eyes a-looking at him, and believing him. Well, sir, he turned the conversation as well as he could, and he took 'em down Love Lane to the water-meadows, and there Master Harry would have drowned himself in half a moment more, a-getting out a water-lily for her—but nothing daunted that boy. Well, sir, they was tired out. All being so new and strange to 'em, they was tired

as tired could be. And they laid down on a bank of daisies, like the children in the wood, leastways meadows, and fell asleep.

Boots don't know—perhaps I do—but never mind, it don't signify either way—why it made a man fit to make a fool of himself to see them two pretty babies a-lying there in the clear, still day, not dreaming half so hard when they was asleep as they done when they was awake. But, Lord! when you come to think of yourself, you know, and what a game you have been up to ever since you was in your own cradle, and what a poor sort of chap you are, and how it's always either Yesterday with you, or To-morrow, and never To-day, that's where it is!

Well, sir, they woke up at last, and then one thing was getting pretty clear to Boots—namely, that Mrs. Harry Walmerses, Junior's, temper was on the move. When Master Harry took her round the waist, she said he "teased her so"; and when he says, "Norah, my young May Moon, your Harry tease you?" she tells him, "Yes; and I want to go home."

A biled fowl and baked bread-and-butter pudding brought Mrs. Walmers up a little; but Boots could have wished, he must privately own to me, to have seen her more sensible of the woice of love, and less abandoning of herself to currants. However, Master Harry, he kept up, and his noble heart was as fond as ever. Mrs. Walmers turned very sleepy about dusk, and began to cry. Therefore, Mrs. Walmers went off to bed as per yesterday; and Master Harry ditto repeated.

About eleven or twelve at night comes back the Governor in a chaise, along with Mr. Walmers and a elderly lady. Mr. Walmers looks amused and very serious, both at once, and says to our Missis: "We are much indebted to you, ma'am, for your kind care of our little children. which we

can never sufficiently acknowledge. Pray, ma'am, where is my boy?" Our Missis says: "Cobbs has the dear child in charge, sir. Cobbs, show Forty!" Then he says to Cobbs: "Ah, Cobbs, I am glad to see *you!* I understood you was here!" And Cobbs says: "Yes, sir. Your most obedient, sir."

I may be surprised to hear Boots say it, perhaps; but Boots assures me that his heart beat like a hammer, going up-stairs. "I beg your pardon, sir," says he, while unlocking the door; "I do hope you are not angry with Master Harry. For Master Harry is a fine boy, sir, and will do you credit and honor." And Boots signifies to me that, if the fine boy's father had contradicted him in the daring state of mind in which he then was, he thinks he should have "fetched him a crack," and taken the consequences.

But Mr. Walmers only says: "No, Cobbs. No, my good fellow. Thank you!" And, the door being opened, goes in.

Boots goes in, too, holding the light, and he sees Mr. Walmers go up to the bedside, bend gently down, and kiss the little sleeping face. Then he stands looking at it for a minute, looking wonderfully like it (they do say he ran away with Mrs. Walmers); and then he gently shakes the little shoulder.

"Harry, my dear boy! Harry!"

Master Harry starts up and looks at him. Looks at Cobbs, too. Such is the honor of that mite, that he looks at Cobbs, to see whether he has brought him into trouble.

"I'm not angry, my child. I only want you to dress yourself and come home."

"Yes, pa."

Master Harry dresses himself quickly. His breast begins to swell when he has nearly finished, and it swells

more and more as he stands, at last, a-looking at his father; his father standing a-looking at him, the quiet image of him.

"Please may I"—the spirit of that little creatur', and the way he kept his rising tears down!—"please, dear pa—may I—kiss Norah before I go?"

"You may, my child."

So he takes Master Harry in his hand, and Boots leads the way with the candle, and they come to that other bedroom, where the elderly lady is seated by the bed, and poor little Mrs. Harry Walmers, Junior, is fast asleep. There the father lifts the child up to the pillow, and he lays his little face down for an instant by the little warm face of poor unconscious little Mrs. Harry Walmers, Junior, and gently draws it to him—a sight so touching to the chambermaids, who are peeping through the door, that one of them called out, "It's a shame to part 'em!" But this chambermaid was always, as Boots informs us, a soft-hearted one. Not that there was any harm in that girl. Far from it.

Finally, Boots says, that's all about it. Mr. Walmers drove away in the chaise, having hold of Master Harry's hand. The elderly lady and Mrs. Walmers, Junior, that was never to be (she married a Captain long afterward, and died in India), went off next day. In conclusion, Boots puts it to me whether I hold with him in two opinions: firstly, that there are not many couples on their way to be married who are half as innocent of guile as those two children; secondly, that it would be a jolly good thing for a great many couples on their way to be married, if they could only be stopped in time, and brought back separately.

IX

A STORY OF SEVEN DEVILS

BY

Frank R. Stockton (1834–1902)

A Story of Seven Devils[1]

Frank R. Stockton (1834–1902)

THE negro church which stood in the pine woods near the little village of Oxford Cross Roads, in one of the lower counties of Virginia, was presided over by an elderly individual, known to the community in general as Uncle Pete; but on Sundays the members of his congregation addressed him as Brudder Pete. He was an earnest and energetic man, and, although he could neither read nor write, he had for many years expounded the Scriptures to the satisfaction of his hearers. His memory was good, and those portions of the Bible, which from time to time he had heard read, were used by him, and frequently with powerful effect, in his sermons. His interpretations of the Scriptures were generally entirely original, and were made to suit the needs, or what he supposed to be the needs, of his congregation.

Whether as "Uncle Pete" in the garden and corn-field, or "Brudder Pete" in the church, he enjoyed the good opinion of everybody excepting one person, and that was his wife. She was a high-tempered and somewhat dissatisfied person, who had conceived the idea that her husband was in the habit of giving too much time to the church, and too little to the acquisition of corn-bread and pork. On a certain Saturday she gave him a most tre-

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mendous scolding, which so affected the spirits of the good man that it influenced his decision in regard to the selection of the subject for his sermon the next day.

His congregation was accustomed to being astonished, and rather liked it, but never before had their minds received such a shock as when the preacher announced the subject of his discourse. He did not take any particular text, for this was not his custom, but he boldly stated that the Bible declared that every woman in this world was possessed by seven devils; and the evils which this state of things had brought upon the world, he showed forth with much warmth and feeling. Subject-matter, principally from his own experience, crowded in upon his mind, and he served it out to his audience hot and strong. If his deductions could have been proved to be correct, all women were creatures who, by reason of their sevenfold diabolic possession, were not capable of independent thought or action, and who should in tears and humility place themselves absolutely under the direction and authority of the other sex.

When he approached the conclusion of his sermon, Brother Peter closed with a bang the Bible, which, although he could not read a word of it, always lay open before him while he preached, and delivered the concluding exhortation of his sermon.

"Now, my dear brev'ren ob dis congregation," he said, "I want you to understan' dat dar's nuffin in dis yer sarmon wot you've jus' heerd ter make you think yousefs angels. By no means, brev'ren; you was all brung up by women, an' you've got ter lib wid' em, an ef anythin' in dis yer worl' is ketchin', my dear brev'ren, it's habin debbils, an' from wot I've seen ob some ob de men ob dis worl' I 'spect dey is persest ob 'bout all de debbils dey got room fur. But de Bible don' say nuffin p'intedly on de subjec'

ob de number ob debbils in man, an' I 'spec' dose dat's got 'em—an' we ought ter feel pow'ful thankful, my dear brev'ren, dat de Bible don' say we all's got 'em—has 'em 'cordin to sarcumstances. But wid de women it's dif'rent; dey's got jus' sebin, an' bless my soul, brev'ren, I think dat's 'nuff.

"While I was a-turnin' ober in my min' de subjec' ob dis sarmon, dere come ter me a bit ob Scripter wot I heerd at a big preachin' an' baptizin' at Kyarter's Mills, 'bout ten year' ago. One ob de preachers was a-tellin' about ole mudder Ebe a-eatin' de apple, and says he: De sarpint fus' come along wid a red apple, an' says he: 'You gib dis yer to your husban', an' he think it so mighty good dat when he done eat it he gib you anything you ax him fur, ef you tell him whar de tree is.' Ebe, she took one bite, an' den she frew dat apple away. 'Wot you mean, you triflin' sarpint,' says she, 'a fotchin' me dat apple wot ain't good fur nuffin but ter make cider wid?' Den de sarpint he go fotch her a yaller apple, an' she took one bite, an' den says she: 'Go 'long wid ye, you fool sarpint, wot you fotch me dat June apple wot ain't got no taste to it?' Den de sarpint he think she like sumpin' sharp, an' he fotch her a green apple. She takes one bite ob it, an' den she frows it at his head, an' sings out: 'Is you 'spectin' me to gib dat apple to yer Uncle Adam an' gib him de colic?' Den de debbil he fotch her a lady-apple, but she say she won't take no sich triflin' nubbins as dat to her husban', an' she took one bite ob it, an' frew it away. Den he go fotch her two udder kin' ob apples, one yaller wid red stripes, an' de udder one red on one side an' green on de udder—mighty good-lookin' apples, too—de kin' you git two dollars a bar'l fur at the store. But Ebe, she wouldn't hab neider ob 'em, an' when she done took one bite out ob each one, she frew it away. Den de ole debbil-

sarpint, he scratch he head, an' he say to hese'f: 'Dis yer Ebe, she pow'ful 'ticklar 'bout her apples. Reckin I'll have ter wait till after fros', an' fotch her a real good one.' An' he done wait till after fros', and then he fotch her a' Albemarle pippin, an' when she took one bite ob dat, she jus' go 'long an' eat it all up, core, seeds, an' all. 'Look h'yar, sarpint,' says she, 'hab you got anudder ob dem apples in your pocket?' An' den he tuk one out, an' gib it to her. ''Cuse me,' says she, 'I's gwine ter look up Adam, an' ef he don' want ter know war de tree is wot dese apples grow on, you can hab him fur a corn-field han'.'

"An' now, my dear brev'ren," said Brother Peter, "while I was a-turnin' dis subjec' ober in my min', an' wonderin' how de women come ter hab jus' seben debbils apiece, I done reckerleck dat bit ob Scripter wot I heerd at Kyarter's Mills, an' I reckon dat 'splains how de debbils got inter woman. De sarpint he done fotch mudder Ebe seben apples, an' ebery one she take a bite out of gib her a debbil."

As might have been expected, this sermon produced a great sensation, and made a deep impression on the congregation. As a rule, the men were tolerably well satisfied with it; and when the services were over many of them made it the occasion of shy but very plainly pointed remarks to their female friends and relatives.

But the women did not like it at all. Some of them became angry, and talked very forcibly, and feelings of indignation soon spread among all the sisters of the church. If their minister had seen fit to stay at home and preach a sermon like this to his own wife (who, it may be remarked, was not present on this occasion), it would have been well enough, provided he had made no allusions to outsiders; but to come there and preach such things to them was

entirely too much for their endurance. Each one of the women knew she had not seven devils, and only a few of them would admit of the possibility of any of the others being possessed by quite so many.

Their preacher's explanation of the manner in which every woman came to be possessed of just so many devils appeared to them of little importance. What they objected to was the fundamental doctrine of his sermon, which was based on his assertion that the Bible declared every woman had seven devils. They were not willing to believe that the Bible said any such thing. Some of them went so far as to state it was their opinion that Uncle Pete had got this fool notion from some of the lawyers at the court-house when he was on a jury a month or so before. It was quite noticeable that, although Sunday afternoon had scarcely begun, the majority of the women of the congregation called their minister Uncle Pete. This was very strong evidence of a sudden decline in his popularity.

Some of the more vigorous-minded women, not seeing their minister among the other people in the clearing in front of the log church, went to look for him, but he was not to be found. His wife had ordered him to be home early, and soon after the congregation had been dismissed he departed by a short cut through the woods. That afternoon an irate committee, composed principally of women, but including also a few men who had expressed disbelief in the new doctrine, arrived at the cabin of their preacher, but found there only his wife, cross-grained old Aunt Rebecca. She informed them that her husband was not at home.

"He's done 'gaged hisse'f," she said, "ter cut an' haul wood fur Kunnel Martin ober on Little Mount'n fur de whole ob nex' week. It's fourteen or thirteen mile' from h'yar, an' ef he'd started ter-morrer mawnin', he'd los'

a'mos' a whole day. 'Sides dat, I done tole him dat ef he git dar ter-night he'd have his supper frowed in. Wot you all want wid him? Gwine to pay him fur preachin'?"

Any such intention as this was instantaneously denied, and Aunt Rebecca was informed of the subject upon which her visitors had come to have a very plain talk with her husband.

Strange to say, the announcement of the new and startling dogma had apparently no disturbing effect upon Aunt Rebecca. On the contrary, the old woman seemed rather to enjoy the news.

"Reckin he oughter know all 'bout dat," she said. "He's done had three wives, an' he ain't got rid o' dis one yit."

Judging from her chuckles and waggings of the head when she made this remark, it might be imagined that Aunt Rebecca was rather proud of the fact that her husband thought her capable of exhibiting a different kind of diabolism every day in the week.

The leader of the indignant church-members was Susan Henry, a mulatto woman of a very independent turn of mind. She prided herself that she never worked in anybody's house but her own, and this immunity from outside service gave her a certain pre-eminence among her sisters. Not only did Susan share the general resentment with which the startling statement of old Peter had been received, but she felt that its promulgation had affected her position in the community. If every woman was possessed by seven devils, then, in this respect, she was no better nor worse than any of the others; and at this her proud heart rebelled. If the preacher had said some women had eight devils and others six, it would have been better. She might then have made a mental arrangement in regard to her relative position which would have somewhat

consoled her. But now there was no chance for that The words of the preacher had equally debased all women.

A meeting of the disaffected church-members was held the next night at Susan Henry's cabin, or rather in the little yard about it, for the house was not large enough to hold the people who attended it. The meeting was not regularly organized, but everybody said what he or she had to say, and the result was a great deal of clamor, and a general increase of indignation against Uncle Pete.

"Look h'yar!" cried Susan, at the end of some energetic remarks, "is dar enny pusson h'yar who kin count up figgers?"

Inquiries on the subject ran through the crowd, and in a few moments a black boy, about fourteen, was pushed forward as an expert in arithmetic.

"Now, you Jim," said Susan, "you's been to school, an' you kin count up figgers. 'Cordin' ter de chu'ch books dar's forty-seben women b'longin' to our meetin', an' ef each one ob dem dar has got seben debbils in her, I jus' wants you ter tell me how many debbils come to chu'ch ebery clear Sunday ter hear dat ole Uncle Pete preach."

This view of the case created a sensation, and much interest was shown in the result of Jim's calculations, which were made by the aid of a back of an old letter and a piece of pencil furnished by Susan. The result was at last announced as three hundred and nineteen, which, although not precisely correct, was near enough to satisfy the company.

"Now, you jus' turn dat ober in you all's minds," said Susan. "More'n free hundred debbils in chu'ch ebery Sunday, an' we women fotchin 'em. Does anybody s'pose I's gwine ter b'lieve dat fool talk?"

A middle-aged man now lifted up his voice and said: "I's been thinkin' ober dis h'yar matter and I's 'cluded

dat p'r'aps de words ob de preacher was used in a figgeratous form o' sense. P'r'aps de seben debbils meant chillun."

These remarks were received with no favor by the assemblage.

"Oh, you git out!" crièd Susan. "Your ole woman's got seben chillun, shore 'nuf, an' I s'pec' dey's all debbils. But dem sent'ments don't apply ter all de udder women h'yar, 'tic'larly ter dem dar young uns wot ain't married yit."

This was good logic, but the feeling on the subject proved to be even stronger, for the mothers in the company became so angry at their children being considered devils that for a time there seemed to be danger of an Amazonian attack on the unfortunate speaker. This was averted, but a great deal of uproar now ensued, and it was the general feeling that something ought to be done to show the deep-seated resentment with which the horrible charge against the mothers and sisters of the congregation had been met. Many violent propositions were made, some of the younger men going so far as to offer to burn down the church. It was finally agreed, quite unanimously, that old Peter should be unceremoniously ousted from his place in the pulpit which he had filled so many years.

As the week passed on, some of the older men of the congregation who had friendly feelings toward their old companion and preacher talked the matter over among themselves, and afterward, with many of their fellow-members, succeeded at last in gaining the general consent that Uncle Pete should be allowed a chance to explain himself, and give his grounds and reasons for his astounding statement in regard to womankind. If he could show biblical authority for this, of course nothing more could be said. But if he could not, then he must get down from the pulpit, and sit for the rest of his life on a back seat of

the church. This proposition met with the more favor, because even those who were most indignant had an earnest curiosity to know what the old man would say for himself.

During all this time of angry discussion, good old Peter was quietly and calmly cutting and hauling wood on the Little Mountain. His mind was in a condition of great comfort and peace, for not only had he been able to rid himself, in his last sermon, of many of the hard thoughts concerning women that had been gathering themselves together for years, but his absence from home had given him a holiday from the harassments of Aunt Rebecca's tongue, so that no new notions of woman's culpability had risen within him. He had dismissed the subject altogether, and had been thinking over a sermon regarding baptism, which he thought he could make convincing to certain of the younger members of his congregation.

He arrived at home very late on Saturday night, and retired to his simple couch without knowing anything of the terrible storm which had been gathering through the week, and which was to burst upon him on the morrow. But the next morning, long before church time, he received warning enough of what was going to happen. Individuals and deputations gathered in and about his cabin—some to tell him all that had been said and done; some to inform him what was expected of him; some to stand about and look at him; some to scold; some to denounce; but, alas! not one to encourage; nor one to call him "Brudder Pete," that Sunday appellation dear to his ears. But the old man possessed a stubborn soul, not easily to be frightened.

"Wot I says in de pulpit," he remarked, "I'll 'splain in de pulpit, an' you all ud better git 'long to de chu'ch, an' when de time fur de sarvice come, I'll be dar."

This advice was not promptly acted upon, but in the course of half an hour nearly all the villagers and loungers

had gone off to the church in the woods; and when Uncle Peter had put on his high black hat, somewhat battered, but still sufficiently clerical looking for that congregation, and had given something of a polish to his cowhide shoes, he betook himself by the accustomed path to the log building where he had so often held forth to his people. As soon as he entered the church he was formally instructed by a committee of the leading members that before he began to open the services, he must make it plain to the congregation that what he had said on the preceding Sunday about every woman being possessed by seven devils was Scripture truth, and not mere wicked nonsense out of his own brain. If he could not do that, they wanted no more praying or preaching from him.

Uncle Peter made no answer, but, ascending the little pulpit, he put his hat on the bench behind him where it was used to repose, took out his red cotton handkerchief and blew his nose in his accustomed way, and looked about him. The house was crowded. Even Aunt Rebecca was there.

After a deliberate survey of his audience, the preacher spoke: "Brev'eren an' sisters, I see afore me Brudder Bill Hines, who kin read de Bible, an' has got one. Ain't dat so, Brudder?"

Bill Hines having nodded and modestly grunted assent, the preacher continued. "An' dars' Aun' Priscilla's boy, Jake, who ain't a brudder yit, though he's plenty old 'nuf, min', I tell ye; an' he kin read de Bible, fus' rate, an' has read it ter me ober an' ober ag'in. Ain't dat so, Jake?"

Jake grinned, nodded, and hung his head, very uncomfortable at being thus publicly pointed out.

"An' dar's good ole Aun' Patty, who knows more Scripter dan ennybuddy h'yar, havin' been teached by de little gals from Kunnel Jasper's an' by dere mudders afore

'em. I reckin she know' de hull Bible straight froo, from de Garden of Eden to de New Jerus'lum. An' dar are udders h'yar who knows de Scripters, some one part an' some anudder. Now I axes ebery one ob you all wot know de Scripters ef he don' 'member how de Bible tells how our Lor' when he was on dis yearth cas' seben debbils out o' Mary Magdalum?"

A murmur of assent came from the congregation. Most of them remembered that.

"But did enny ob you ebber read, or hab read to you, dat he ebber cas' 'em out o' enny udder woman?"

Negative grunts and shakes of the head signified that nobody had ever heard of this.

"Well, den," said the preacher, gazing blandly around, "all de udder women got 'em yit."

A deep silence fell upon the assembly, and in a few moments an elderly member arose. "Brudder Pete," he said, "I reckin you mought as well gib out de hyme."

X

A DOG'S TALE

BY

Mark Twain (1835)

A Dog's Tale[1]

Mark Twain (1835)

I

MY father was a St. Bernard, my mother was a collie, but I am a Presbyterian. This is what my mother told me; I do not know these nice distinctions myself. To me they are only fine large words meaning nothing. My mother had a fondness for such; she liked to say them, and see other dogs look surprised and envious, as wondering how she got so much education. But, indeed, it was not real education; it was only show: she got the words by listening in the dining-room and drawing-room when there was company, and by going with the children to Sunday-school and listening there; and whenever she heard a large word she said it over to herself many times, and so was able to keep it until there was a dogmatic gathering in the neighborhood, then she would get it off, and surprise and distress them all, from pocket-pup to mastiff, which rewarded her for all her trouble. If there was a stranger he was nearly sure to be suspicious, and when he got his breath again he would ask her what it meant. And she always told him. He was never expecting this, but thought he would catch her; so when she told him, he was the one that looked ashamed, whereas he had

[1] Copyright, 1903, 1904, by Samuel L. Clemens. Harper & Brothers.

thought it was going to be she. The others were always waiting for this, and glad of it and proud of her, for they knew what was going to happen, because they had had experience. When she told the meaning of a big word they were all so taken up with admiration that it never occurred to any dog to doubt if it was the right one; and that was natural, because, for one thing, she answered up so promptly that it seemed like a dictionary speaking, and for another thing, where could they find out whether it was right or not? for she was the only cultivated dog there was. By-and-by, when I was older, she brought home the word Unintellectual, one time, and worked it pretty hard all the week at different gatherings, making much unhappiness and despondency; and it was at this time that I noticed that during that week she was asked for the meaning at eight different assemblages, and flashed out a fresh definition every time, which showed me that she had more presence of mind than culture, though I said nothing, of course. She had one word which she always kept on hand, and ready, like a life-preserver, a kind of emergency word to strap on when she was likely to get washed overboard in a sudden way—that was the word Synonymous. When she happened to fetch out a long word which had had its day weeks before and its prepared meanings gone to her dump-pile, if there was a stranger there of course it knocked him groggy for a couple of minutes, then he would come to, and by that time she would be away down the wind on another tack, and not expecting anything; so when he'd hail and ask her to cash in, I (the only dog on the inside of her game) could see her canvas flicker a moment,—but only just a moment, —then it would belly out taut and full, and she would say, as calm as a summer's day, "It's synonymous with supererogation," or some godless long reptile of a word like that,

and go placidly about and skim away on the next tack, perfectly comfortable, you know, and leave that stranger looking profane and embarrassed, and the initiated slatting the floor with their tails in unison and their faces transfigured with a holy joy.

And it was the same with phrases. She would drag home a whole phrase, if it had a grand sound, and play it six nights and two matinées, and explain it a new way every time,—which she had to, for all she cared for was the phrase; she wasn't interested in what it meant, and knew those dogs hadn't wit enough to catch her, anyway. Yes, she was a daisy! She got so she wasn't afraid of anything, she had such confidence in the ignorance of those creatures. She even brought anecdotes that she had heard the family and the dinner guests laugh and shout over; and as a rule she got the nub of one chestnut hitched onto another chestnut, where, of course, it didn't fit and hadn't any point; and when she delivered the nub she fell over and rolled on the floor and laughed and barked in the most insane way, while I could see that she was wondering to herself why it didn't seem as funny as it did when she first heard it. But no harm was done; the others rolled and barked too, privately ashamed of themselves for not seeing the point, and never suspecting that the fault was not with them and there wasn't any to see.

You can see by these things that she was of a rather vain and frivolous character; still, she had virtues, and enough to make up, I think. She had a kind heart and gentle ways, and never harbored resentments for injuries done her, but put them easily out of her mind and forgot them; and she taught her children her kindly way, and from her we learned also to be brave and prompt in time of danger, and not to run away, but face the peril that threatened friend or stranger, and help him the best we could

without stopping to think what the cost might be to us. And she taught us, not by words only, but by example, and that is the best way and the surest and the most lasting. Why, the brave things she did, the splendid things! she was just a soldier; and so modest about it—well, you couldn't help admiring her, and you couldn't help imitating her; not even a King Charles spaniel could remain entirely despicable in her society. So, as you see, there was more to her than her education.

II

When I was well grown, at last, I was sold and taken away, and I never saw her again. She was broken-hearted, and so was I, and we cried; but she comforted me as well as she could, and said we were sent into this world for a wise and good purpose, and must do our duties without repining, take our life as we might find it, live it for the best good of others, and never mind about the results; they were not our affair. She said men who did like this would have a noble and beautiful reward by-and-by in another world, and although we animals would not go there, to do well and right without reward would give to our brief lives a worthiness and dignity which in itself would be a reward. She had gathered these things from time to time when she had gone to the Sunday-school with the children, and had laid them up in her memory more carefully than she had done with those other words and phrases; and she had studied them deeply, for her good and ours. One may see by this that she had a wise and thoughtful head, for all there was so much lightness and vanity in it.

So we said our farewells, and looked our last upon each other through our tears; and the last thing she said—keeping it for the last to make me remember it the better, I

think—was, "In memory of me, when there is a time of danger to another do not think of yourself, think of your mother, and do as she would do."

Do you think I could forget that? No.

III

It was such a charming home!—my new one; a fine great house, with pictures, and delicate decorations, and rich furniture, and no gloom anywhere, but all the wilderness of dainty colors lit up with flooding sunshine; and the spacious grounds around it, and the great garden—oh, greensward, and noble trees, and flowers, no end! And I was the same as a member of the family; and they loved me, and petted me, and did not give me a new name, but called me by my old one that was dear to me because my mother had given it me—Aileen Mavourneen. She got it out of a song; and the Grays knew that song, and said it was a beautiful name.

Mrs. Gray was thirty, and so sweet and so lovely, you cannot imagine it; and Sadie was ten, and just like her mother, just a darling slender little copy of her, with auburn tails down her back, and short frocks; and the baby was a year old, and plump and dimpled, and fond of me, and never could get enough of hauling on my tail, and hugging me, and laughing out its innocent happiness; and Mr. Gray was thirty-eight, and tall and slender and handsome, a little bald in front, alert, quick in his movements, businesslike, prompt, decided, unsentimental, and with that kind of trim-chiselled face that just seems to glint and sparkle with frosty intellectuality! He was a renowned scientist. I do not know what the word means, but my mother would know how to use it and get effects. She would know how to lepress a rat-terrier with it and make a lap-dog look

sorry he came. But that is not the best one; the best one was Laboratory. My mother could organize a Trust on that one that would skin the tax-collars off the whole herd. The laboratory was not a book, or a picture, or a place to wash your hands in, as the college president's dog said—no, that is the lavatory; the laboratory is quite different, and is filled with jars, and bottles, and electrics, and wires, and strange machines; and every week other scientists came there and sat in the place, and used the machines, and discussed, and made what they called experiments and discoveries; and often I came, too, and stood around and listened, and tried to learn, for the sake of my mother, and in loving memory of her, although it was a pain to me, as realizing what she was losing out of her life and I gaining nothing at all; for try as I might, I was never able to make anything out of it at all.

Other times I lay on the floor in the mistress's work-room and slept, she gently using me for a footstool, knowing it pleased me, for it was a caress; other times I spent an hour in the nursery, and got well tousled and made happy; other times I watched by the crib there, when the baby was asleep and the nurse out for a few minutes on the baby's affairs; other times I romped and raced through the grounds and the garden with Sadie till we were tired out, then slumbered on the grass in the shade of a tree while she read her book; other times I went visiting among the neighbor dogs,—for there were some most pleasant ones not far away, and one very handsome and courteous and graceful one, a curly haired Irish setter by the name of Robin Adair, who was a Presbyterian like me, and belonged to the Scotch minister.

The servants in our house were all kind to me and were fond of me, and so, as you see, mine was a pleasant life. There could not be a happier dog than I was, nor a grate-

fuller one. I will say this for myself, for it is only the truth: I tried in all ways to do well and right, and honor my mother's memory and her teachings, and earn the happiness that had come to me, as best I could.

By-and-by came my little puppy, and then my cup was full, my happiness was perfect. It was the dearest little waddling thing, and so smooth and soft and velvety, and had such cunning little awkward paws, and such affectionate eyes, and such a sweet and innocent face; and it made me so proud to see how the children and their mother adored it, and fondled it, and exclaimed over every little wonderful thing it did. It did seem to me that life was just too lovely to—

Then came the winter. One day I was standing a watch in the nursery. That is to say, I was asleep on the bed. The baby was asleep in the crib, which was alongside the bed, on the side next the fireplace. It was the kind of crib that has a lofty tent over it made of a gauzy stuff that you can see through. The nurse was out, and we two sleepers were alone. A spark from the wood-fire was shot out, and it lit on the slope of the tent. I suppose a quiet interval followed, then a scream from the baby woke me, and there was that tent flaming up toward the ceiling! Before I could think, I sprang to the floor in my fright, and in a second was half-way to the door; but in the next half-second my mother's farewell was sounding in my ears, and I was back on the bed again. I reached my head through the flames and dragged the baby out by the waistband, and tugged it along, and we fell to the floor together in a cloud of smoke; I snatched a new hold, and dragged the screaming little creature along and out at the door and around the bend of the hall, and was still

tugging away, all excited and happy and proud, when the master's voice shouted:

"Begone, you cursed beast!" and I jumped to save myself; but he was wonderfully quick, and chased me up, striking furiously at me with his cane, I dodging this way and that, in terror, and at last a strong blow fell upon my left fore-leg, which made me shriek and fall, for the moment, helpless; the cane went up for another blow, but never descended, for the nurse's voice rang wildly out, "The nursery's on fire!" and the master rushed away in that direction, and my other bones were saved.

The pain was cruel, but, no matter, I must not lose any time; he might come back at any moment; so I limped on three legs to the other end of the hall, where there was a dark little stairway leading up into a garret where old boxes and such things were kept, as I had heard say, and where people seldom went. I managed to climb up there, then I searched my way through the dark among the piles of things, and hid in the secretest place I could find. It was foolish to be afraid there, yet still I was; so afraid that I held in and hardly even whimpered, though it would have been such a comfort to whimper, because that eases the pain, you know. But I could lick my leg, and that did me some good.

For half an hour there was a commotion down-stairs, and shoutings, and rushing footsteps, and then there was quiet again. Quiet for some minutes, and that was grateful to my spirit, for then my fears began to go down; and fears are worse than pains,—oh, much worse. Then came a sound that froze me! They were calling me—calling me by name—hunting for me!

It was muffled by distance, but that could not take the terror out of it, and it was the most dreadful sound to me that I had ever heard. It went all about, every-

where, down there: along the halls, through all the rooms, in both stories, and in the basement and the cellar; then outside, and further and further away—then back, and all about the house again, and I thought it would never, never stop. But at last it did, hours and hours after the vague twilight of the garret had long ago been blotted out by black darkness.

Then in that blessed stillness my terror fell little by little away, and I was at peace and slept. It was a good rest I had, but I woke before the twilight had come again. I was feeling fairly comfortable, and I could think out a plan now. I made a very good one; which was, to creep down, all the way down the back stairs, and hide behind the cellar door, and slip out and escape when the iceman came at dawn, while he was inside filling the refrigerator; then I would hide all day, and start on my journey when night came; my journey to—well, anywhere where they would not know me and betray me to the master. I was feeling almost cheerful now; then suddenly I thought, Why, what would life be without my puppy!

That was despair. There was no plan for me; I saw that; I must stay where I was; stay, and wait, and take what might come—it was not my affair; that was what life is—my mother had said it. Then—well, then the calling began again! All my sorrows came back. I said to myself, the master will never forgive. I did not know what I had done to make him so bitter and so unforgiving, yet I judged it was something a dog could not understand, but which was clear to a man and dreadful.

They called and called—days and nights, it seemed to me. So long that the hunger and thirst near drove me mad, and I recognized that I was getting very weak. When you are this way you sleep a great deal, and I did. Once I woke in an awful fright—it seemed to me that the

calling was right there in the garret! And so it was: it was Sadie's voice, and she was crying; my name was falling from her lips all broken, poor thing, and I could not believe my ears for the joy of it when I heard her say,

"Come back to us—oh, come back to us, and forgive—it is all so sad without our—"

I broke in with *such* a grateful little yelp, and the next moment Sadie was plunging and stumbling through the darkness and the lumber and shouting for the family to hear, "She's found! she's found!"

The days that followed—well, they were wonderful. The mother and Sadie and the servants—why, they just seemed to worship me. They couldn't seem to make me a bed that was fine enough; and as for food, they couldn't be satisfied with anything but game and delicacies that were out of season; and every day the friends and neighbors flocked in to hear about my heroism—that was the name they called it by, and it means agriculture. I remember my mother pulling it on a kennel once, and explaining it that way, but didn't say what agriculture was, except that it was synonymous with intramural incandescence; and a dozen times a day Mrs. Gray and Sadie would tell the tale to new-comers, and say I risked my life to save the baby's, and both of us had burns to prove it, and then the company would pass me around and pet me and exclaim about me, and you could see the pride in the eyes of Sadie and her mother; and when the people wanted to know what made me limp, they looked ashamed and changed the subject, and sometimes when people hunted them this way and that way with questions about it, it looked to me as if they were going to cry.

And this was not all the glory; no, the master's friends came, a whole twenty of the most distinguished people,

and had me in the laboratory, and discussed me as if I was a kind of discovery; and some of them said it was wonderful in a dumb beast, the finest exhibition of instinct they could call to mind; but the master said, with vehemence, "It's far above instinct; it's *reason*, and many a man, privileged to be saved and go with you and me to a better world by right of its possession, has less of it than this poor silly quadruped that's foreordained to perish"; and then he laughed, and said, "Why, look at me—I'm a sarcasm! Bless you, with all my grand intelligence, the only thing I inferred was that the dog had gone mad and was destroying the child, whereas but for the beast's intelligence—it's *reason*, I tell you!—the child would have perished!"

They disputed and disputed, and *I* was the very centre and subject of it all, and I wished my mother could know that this grand honor had come to me; it would have made her proud.

Then they discussed optics, as they called it, and whether a certain injury to the brain would produce blindness or not, but they could not agree about it, and said they must test it by experiment by-and-by; and next they discussed plants, and that interested me, because in the summer Sadie and I had planted seeds—I helped her dig the holes, you know, —and after days and days a little shrub or a flower came up there, and it was a wonder how that could happen; but it did, and I wished I could talk,—I would have told those people about it and shown them how much I knew, and been all alive with the subject; but I didn't care for the optics; it was dull, and when they came back to it again it bored me, and I went to sleep.

Pretty soon it was spring, and sunny and pleasant and lovely, and the sweet mother and the children patted me and the puppy good-bye, and went away on a journey and a visit to their kin, and the master wasn't any company for

us, but we played together and had good times, and the servants were kind and friendly, so we got along quite happily and counted the days and waited for the family.

And one day those men came again, and said now for the test, and they took the puppy to the laboratory, and I limped three-leggedly along, too, feeling proud, for any attention shown the puppy was a pleasure to me, of course. They discussed and experimented, and then suddenly the puppy shrieked, and they set him on the floor, and he went staggering around, with his head all bloody, and the master clapped his hands, and shouted:

"There, I've won—confess it! He's as blind as a bat!"

And they all said,

"It's so—you've proved your theory, and suffering humanity owes you a great debt from henceforth," and they crowded around him, and wrung his hand cordially and thankfully, and praised him.

But I hardly saw or heard these things, for I ran at once to my little darling, and snuggled close to it where it lay, and licked the blood, and it put its head against mine, whimpering softly, and I knew in my heart it was a comfort to it in its pain and trouble to feel its mother's touch, though it could not see me. Then it drooped down, presently, and its little velvet nose rested upon the floor, and it was still, and did not move any more.

Soon the master stopped discussing a moment, and rang in the footman, and said, "Bury it in the far corner of the garden," and then went on with the discussion, and I trotted after the footman, very happy and grateful, for I knew the puppy was out of its pain now, because it was asleep. We went far down the garden to the furthest end, where the children and the nurse and the puppy and I used to play in the summer in the shade of a great elm, and there the footman dug a hole, and I saw he was going

to plant the puppy, and I was glad, because it would grow and come up a fine handsome dog, like Robin Adair, and be a beautiful surprise for the family when they came home; so I tried to help him dig, but my lame leg was no good, being stiff, you know, and you have to have two, or it is no use. When the footman had finished and covered little Robin up, he patted my head, and there were tears in his eyes, and he said, "Poor little doggie, you SAVED *his* child."

I have watched two whole weeks, and he doesn't come up! This last week a fright has been stealing upon me. I think there is something terrible about this. I do not know what it is, but the fear makes me sick, and I cannot eat, though the servants bring me the best of food; and they pet me so, and even come in the night, and cry, and say, "Poor doggie—do give it up and come home; *don't* break our hearts!" and all this terrifies me the more, and makes me sure something has happened. And I am so weak; since yesterday I cannot stand on my feet any more. And within this hour the servants, looking toward the sun where it was sinking out of sight and the night chill coming on, said things I could not understand, but they carried something cold to my heart.

"Those poor creatures! They do not suspect. They will come home in the morning, and eagerly ask for the little doggie that did the brave deed, and who of us will be strong enough to say the truth to them: 'The humble little friend is gone where go the beasts that perish.'"

XI

THE OUTCASTS OF POKER FLAT

BY

Bret Harte (1839–1902)

The Outcasts of Poker Flat[1]

Bret Harte (1839–1902)

As Mr. John Oakhurst, gambler, stepped into the main street of Poker Flat on the morning of the 23d of November, 1850, he was conscious of a change in its moral atmosphere since the preceding night. Two or three men, conversing earnestly together, ceased as he approached, and exchanged significant glances. There was a Sabbath lull in the air, which, in a settlement unused to Sabbath influences, looked ominous.

Mr. Oakhurst's calm, handsome face betrayed small concern in these indications. Whether he was conscious of any predisposing cause was another question. "I reckon they're after somebody," he reflected; "likely it's me." He returned to his pocket the handkerchief with which he had been whipping away the red dust of Poker Flat from his neat boots, and quietly discharged his mind of any further conjecture.

In point of fact, Poker Flat was "after somebody." It had lately suffered the loss of several thousand dollars, two valuable horses, and a prominent citizen. It was experiencing a spasm of virtuous reaction, quite as lawless and ungovernable as any of the acts that had provoked it. A secret committee had determined to rid the town of all improper persons. This was done permanently in

[1] From *The Luck of Roaring Camp*. Copyright, 1871, by James R. Osgood & Co. Copyright, 1899, by Bret Harte; Houghton Mifflin Co.

regard of two men who were then hanging from the boughs of a sycamore in the gulch, and temporarily in the banishment of certain other objectionable characters. I regret to say that some of these were ladies. It is but due to the sex, however, to state that their impropriety was professional, and it was only in such easily established standards of evil that Poker Flat ventured to sit in judgment.

Mr. Oakhurst was right in supposing that he was included in this category. A few of the committee had urged hanging him as a possible example, and a sure method of reimbursing themselves from his pockets of the sums he had won from them. "It's agin justice," said Jim Wheeler, "to let this yer young man from Roaring Camp—an entire stranger—carry away our money." But a crude sentiment of equity residing in the breasts of those who had been fortunate enough to win from Mr. Oakhurst overruled this narrower local prejudice.

Mr. Oakhurst received his sentence with philosophic calmness, none the less coolly that he was aware of the hesitation of his judges. He was too much of a gambler not to accept fate. With him life was at best an uncertain game, and he recognized the usual percentage in favor of the dealer.

A body of armed men accompanied the deported wickedness of Poker Flat to the outskirts of the settlement. Besides Mr. Oakhurst, who was known to be a coolly desperate man, and for whose intimidation the armed escort was intended, the expatriated party consisted of a young woman familiarly known as the "Duchess"; another who had won the title of "Mother Shipton"; and "Uncle Billy," a suspected sluice-robber and confirmed drunkard. The cavalcade provoked no comments from the spectators, nor was any word uttered by the escort. Only when the gulch which marked the uttermost limit of Poker Flat

was reached, the leader spoke briefly and to the point. The exiles were forbidden to return at the peril of their lives.

As the escort disappeared, their pent-up feelings found vent in a few hysterical tears from the Duchess, some bad language from Mother Shipton, and a Parthian volley of expletives from Uncle Billy. The philosophic Oakhurst alone remained silent. He listened calmly to Mother Shipton's desire to cut somebody's heart out, to the repeated statements of the Duchess that she would die in the road, and to the alarming oaths that seemed to be bumped out of Uncle Billy as he rode forward. With the easy good-humor characteristic of his class, he insisted upon exchanging his own riding-horse, "Five Spot," for the sorry mule which the Duchess rode. But even this act did not draw the party into any closer sympathy. The young woman readjusted her somewhat draggled plumes with a feeble, faded coquetry; Mother Shipton eyed the possessor of "Five Spot" with malevolence, and Uncle Billy included the whole party in one sweeping anathema.

The road to Sandy Bar—a camp that, not having as yet experienced the regenerating influences of Poker Flat, consequently seemed to offer some invitation to the emigrants—lay over a steep mountain range. It was distant a day's severe travel. In that advanced season, the party soon passed out of the moist, temperate regions of the foot-hills into the dry, cold, bracing air of the Sierras. The trail was narrow and difficult. At noon the Duchess, rolling out of her saddle upon the ground, declared her intention of going no farther, and the party halted.

The spot was singularly wild and impressive. A wooded amphitheatre, surrounded on three sides by precipitous cliffs of naked granite, sloped gently toward the crest of another precipice that overlooked the valley. It was,

undoubtedly, the most suitable spot for a camp, had camping been advisable. But Mr. Oakhurst knew that scarcely half the journey to Sandy Bar was accomplished, and the party were not equipped or provisioned for delay. This fact he pointed out to his companions curtly, with a philosophic commentary on the folly of "throwing up their hand before the game was played out." But they were furnished with liquor, which in this emergency stood them in place of food, fuel, rest, and prescience. In spite of his remonstrances, it was not long before they were more or less under its influence. Uncle Billy passed rapidly from a bellicose state into one of stupor, the Duchess became maudlin, and Mother Shipton snored. Mr. Oakhurst alone remained erect, leaning against a rock, calmly surveying them.

Mr. Oakhurst did not drink. It interfered with a profession which required coolness, impassiveness, and presence of mind, and, in his own language, he "couldn't afford it." As he gazed at his recumbent fellow-exiles, the loneliness begotten of his pariah-trade, his habits of life, his very vices, for the first time seriously oppressed him. He bestirred himself in dusting his black clothes, washing his hands and face, and other acts characteristic of his studiously neat habits, and for a moment forgot his annoyance. The thought of deserting his weaker and more pitiable companions never perhaps occurred to him. Yet he could not help feeling the want of that excitement which, singularly enough, was most conducive to that calm equanimity for which he was notorious. He looked at the gloomy walls that rose a thousand feet sheer above the circling pines around him; at the sky, ominously clouded; at the valley below, already deepening into shadow. And, doing so, suddenly he heard his own name called.

A horseman slowly ascended the trail. In the fresh,

open face of the new-comer Mr. Oakhurst recognized Tom Simson, otherwise known as the "Innocent," of Sandy Bar. He had met him some months before over a "little game," and had, with perfect equanimity, won the entire fortune—amounting to some forty dollars—of that guileless youth. After the game was finished, Mr. Oakhurst drew the youthful speculator behind the door and thus addressed him: "Tommy, you're a good little man, but you can't gamble worth a cent. Don't try it over again." He then handed him his money back, pushed him gently from the room, and so made a devoted slave of Tom Simson.

There was a remembrance of this in his boyish and enthusiastic greeting of Mr. Oakhurst. He had started, he said, to go to Poker Flat to seek his fortune. "Alone?" No, not exactly alone; in fact (a giggle), he had run away with Piney Woods. Didn't Mr. Oakhurst remember Piney? She that used to wait on the table at the Temperance House? They had been engaged a long time, but old Jake Woods had objected, and so they had run away, and were going to Poker Flat to be married, and here they were. And they were tired out, and how lucky it was they had found a place to camp, and company. All this the Innocent delivered rapidly, while Piney, a stout, comely damsel of fifteen, emerged from behind the pine-tree where she had been blushing unseen, and rode to the side of her lover.

Mr. Oakhurst seldom troubled himself with sentiment, still less with propriety; but he had a vague idea that the situation was not fortunate. He retained, however, his presence of mind sufficiently to kick Uncle Billy, who was about to say something, and Uncle Billy was sober enough to recognize in Mr. Oakhurst's kick a superior power that would not bear trifling. He then endeavored to dissuade Tom Simson from delaying further, but in vain. He even

pointed out the fact that there was no provision, nor means of making a camp. But, unluckily, the Innocent met this objection by assuring the party that he was provided with an extra mule loaded with provisions, and by the discovery of a rude attempt at a log-house near the trail. "Piney can stay with Mrs. Oakhurst," said the Innocent, pointing to the Duchess, "and I can shift for myself."

Nothing but Mr. Oakhurst's admonishing foot saved Uncle Billy from bursting into a roar of laughter. As it was, he felt compelled to retire up the cañon until he could recover his gravity. There he confided the joke to the tall pine-trees, with many slaps of his leg, contortions of his face, and the usual profanity. But when he returned to the party, he found them seated by a fire—for the air had grown strangely chill and the sky overcast—in apparently amicable conversation. Piney was actually talking in an impulsive, girlish fashion to the Duchess, who was listening with an interest and animation she had not shown for many days. The Innocent was holding forth, apparently with equal effect, to Mr. Oakhurst and Mother Shipton, who was actually relaxing into amiability. "Is this yer a d—d picnic?" said Uncle Billy, with inward scorn, as he surveyed the sylvan group, the glancing firelight, and the tethered animals in the foreground. Suddenly an idea mingled with the alcoholic fumes that disturbed his brain. It was apparently of a jocular nature, for he felt impelled to slap his leg again and cram his fist into his mouth.

As the shadows crept slowly up the mountain, a slight breeze rocked the tops of the pine-trees, and moaned through their long and gloomy aisles. The ruined cabin, patched and covered with pine-boughs, was set apart for the ladies. As the lovers parted they unaffectedly exchanged a kiss, so honest and sincere that it might have

been heard above the swaying pines. The frail Duchess and the malevolent Mother Shipton were probably too stunned to remark upon this last evidence of simplicity, and so turned without a word to the hut. The fire was replenished, the men lay down before the door, and in a few minutes were asleep.

Mr. Oakhurst was a light sleeper. Toward morning he awoke benumbed and cold. As he stirred the dying fire, the wind, which was now blowing strongly, brought to his cheek that which caused the blood to leave it—snow!

He started to his feet with the intention of awakening the sleepers, for there was no time to lose. But turning to where Uncle Billy had been lying, he found him gone. A suspicion leaped to his brain and a curse to his lips. He ran to the spot where the mules had been tethered; they were no longer there. The tracks were already rapidly disappearing in the snow.

The momentary excitement brought Mr. Oakhurst back to the fire with his usual calm. He did not waken the sleepers. The Innocent slumbered peacefully, with a smile on his good-humored, freckled face; the virgin Piney slept beside her frailer sisters as sweetly as though attended by celestial guardians, and Mr. Oakhurst, drawing his blanket over his shoulders, stroked his mustaches and waited for the dawn. It came slowly in a whirling mist of snowflakes, that dazzled and confused the eye. What could be seen of the landscape appeared magically changed. He looked over the valley, and summed up the present and future in two words—"Snowed in!"

A careful inventory of the provisions, which, fortunately for the party, had been stored within the hut, and so escaped the felonious fingers of Uncle Billy, disclosed the fact that with care and prudence they might last ten days longer. "That is," said Mr. Oakhurst, *sotto voce* to the

Innocent, "if you're willing to board us. If you ain't—and perhaps you'd better not—you can wait till Uncle Billy gets back with provisions." For some occult reason, Mr. Oakhurst could not bring himself to disclose Uncle Billy's rascality, and so offered the hypothesis that he had wandered from the camp and had accidentally stampeded the animals. He dropped a warning to the Duchess and Mother Shipton, who of course knew the facts of their associate's defection. "They'll find out the truth about us *all* when they find out anything," he added, significantly, "and there's no good frightening them now."

Tom Simson not only put all his worldly store at the disposal of Mr. Oakhurst, but seemed to enjoy the prospect of their enforced seclusion. "We'll have a good camp for a week, and then the snow 'll melt, and we'll all go back together." The cheerful gayety of the young man and Mr. Oakhurst's calm infected the others. The Innocent, with the aid of pine-boughs, extemporized a thatch for the roofless cabin, and the Duchess directed Piney in the rearrangement of the interior with a taste and tact that opened the blue eyes of that provincial maiden to their fullest extent. "I reckon now you're used to fine things at Poker Flat," said Piney. The Duchess turned away sharply to conceal something that reddened her cheeks through their professional tint, and Mother Shipton requested Piney not to "chatter." But when Mr. Oakhurst returned from a weary search for the trail, he heard the sound of happy laughter echoed from the rocks. He stopped in some alarm, and his thoughts first naturally reverted to the whiskey, which he had prudently *cachéd*. "And yet it don't somehow sound like whiskey," said the gambler. It was not until he caught sight of the blazing fire through the still blinding storm

and the group around it that he settled to the conviction that it was "square fun."

Whether Mr. Oakhurst had *cachéd* his cards with the whiskey as something debarred the free access of the community, I cannot say. It was certain that, in Mother Shipton's words, he "didn't say cards once," during that evening. Haply the time was beguiled by an accordion, produced somewhat ostentatiously by Tom Simson from his pack. Notwithstanding some difficulties attending the manipulation of this instrument, Piney Woods managed to pluck several reluctant melodies from its keys, to an accompaniment by the Innocent on a pair of bone castanets. But the crowning festivity of the evening was reached in a rude camp-meeting hymn, which the lovers, joining hands, sang with great earnestness and vociferation. I fear that a certain defiant tone and Covenanter's swing to its chorus, rather than any devotional quality, caused it speedily to infect the others, who at last joined in the refrain:

> "I'm proud to live in the service of the Lord,
> And I'm bound to die in His army."

The pines rocked, the storm eddied and whirled above the miserable group, and the flames of their altar leaped heavenward, as if in token of the vow.

At midnight the storm abated, the rolling clouds parted, and the stars glittered keenly above the sleeping camp. Mr. Oakhurst, whose professional habits had enabled him to live on the smallest possible amount of sleep, in dividing the watch with Tom Simson, somehow managed to take upon himself the greater part of that duty. He excused himself to the Innocent by saying that he had "often been a week without sleep." "Doing what?" asked Tom. "Poker!" replied Oakhurst, sententiously; "when a man

gets a streak of luck—nigger-luck—he don't get tired. The luck gives in first. Luck," continued the gambler, reflectively, "is a mighty queer thing. All you know about it for certain is that it's bound to change. And it's finding out when it's going to change that makes you. We've had a streak of bad luck since we left Poker Flat—you come along, and slap you get into it, too. If you can hold your cards right along, you're all right. For," added the gambler, with cheerful irrelevance—

> "'I'm proud to live in the service of the Lord,
> And I'm bound to die in His army.'"

The third day came, and the sun, looking through the white-curtained valley, saw the outcasts divide their slowly decreasing store of provisions for the morning meal. It was one of the peculiarities of that mountain climate that its rays diffused a kindly warmth over the wintry landscape, as if in regretful commiseration of the past. But it revealed drift on drift of snow piled high around the hut—a hopeless, uncharted, trackless sea of white lying below the rocky shores to which the castaways still clung. Through the marvellously clear air the smoke of the pastoral village of Poker Flat rose miles away. Mother Shipton saw it, and from a remote pinnacle of her rocky fastness hurled in that direction a final malediction. It was her last vituperative attempt, and perhaps for that reason was invested with a certain degree of sublimity. It did her good, she privately informed the Duchess. "Just you go out there and cuss, and see." She then set herself to the task of amusing "the child," as she and the Duchess were pleased to call Piney. Piney was no chicken, but it was a soothing and original theory of the pair thus to account for the fact that she didn't swear and wasn't improper.

When night crept up again through the gorges, the reedy notes of the accordion rose and fell in fitful spasms and long-drawn gasps by the flickering camp-fire. But music failed to fill entirely the aching void left by insufficient food, and a new diversion was proposed by Piney—story-telling. Neither Mr. Oakhurst nor his female companions caring to relate their personal experiences, this plan would have failed, too, but for the Innocent. Some months before he had chanced upon a stray copy of Mr. Pope's ingenious translation of the *Iliad*. He now proposed to narrate the principal incidents of that poem—having thoroughly mastered the argument and fairly forgotten the words—in the current vernacular of Sandy Bar. And so for the rest of that night the Homeric demigods again walked the earth. Trojan bully and wily Greek wrestled in the winds, and the great pines in the cañon seemed to bow to the wrath of the son of Peleus. Mr. Oakhurst listened with quiet satisfaction. Most especially was he interested in the fate of "Ash-heels," as the Innocent persisted in denominating the "swift-footed Achilles."

So with small food and much of Homer and the accordion, a week passed over the heads of the outcasts. The sun again forsook them, and again from leaden skies the snow-flakes were sifted over the land. Day by day closer around them drew the snowy circle, until at last they looked from their prison over drifted walls of dazzling white, that towered twenty feet above their heads. It became more and more difficult to replenish their fires, even from the fallen trees beside them, now half hidden in the drifts. And yet no one complained. The lovers turned from the dreary prospect and looked into each other's eyes, and were happy. Mr. Oakhurst settled himself coolly to the losing game before him. The Duchess, more cheerful than she had been, assumed the care of Piney. Only Mother Ship-

ton—once the strongest of the party—seemed to sicken and fade. At midnight on the tenth day she called Oakhurst to her side. "I'm going," she said, in a voice of querulous weakness, "but don't say anything about it. Don't waken the kids. Take the bundle from under my head and open it." Mr. Oakhurst did so. It contained Mother Shipton's rations for the last week, untouched. "Give 'em to the child," she said, pointing to the sleeping Piney. "You've starved yourself," said the gambler. "That's what they call it," said the woman, querulously, as she lay down again, and, turning her face to the wall, passed quietly away.

The accordion and the bones were put aside that day, and Homer was forgotten. When the body of Mother Shipton had been committed to the snow, Mr. Oakhurst took the Innocent aside and showed him a pair of snow-shoes, which he had fashioned from the old pack-saddle. "There's one chance in a hundred to save her yet," he said, pointing to Piney; "but it's there," he added, pointing toward Poker Flat. "If you can reach there in two days she's safe." "And you?" asked Tom Simson. "I'll stay here," was the curt reply.

The lovers parted with a long embrace. "You are not going, too?" said the Duchess, as she saw Mr. Oakhurst apparently waiting to accompany him. "As far as the cañon," he replied. He turned suddenly and kissed the Duchess, leaving her pallid face aflame and her trembling limbs rigid with amazement.

Night came, but not Mr. Oakhurst. It brought the storm again and the whirling snow. Then the Duchess, feeding the fire, found that some one had quietly piled beside the hut enough fuel to last a few days longer. The tears rose to her eyes, but she hid them from Piney.

The women slept but little. In the morning, looking

into each other's faces, they read their fate. Neither spoke; but Piney, accepting the position of the stronger, drew near and placed her arm around the Duchess's waist. They kept this attitude for the rest of the day. That night the storm reached its greatest fury, and, rending asunder the protecting pines, invaded the very hut.

Toward morning they found themselves unable to feed the fire, which gradually died away. As the embers slowly blackened, the Duchess crept closer to Piney, and broke the silence of many hours: "Piney, can you pray?" "No, dear," said Piney, simply. The Duchess, without knowing exactly why, felt relieved, and, putting her head upon Piney's shoulder, spoke no more. And so reclining, the younger and purer pillowing the head of her soiled sister upon her virgin breast, they fell asleep.

The wind lulled as if it feared to waken them. Feathery drifts of snow, shaken from the long pine-boughs, flew like white-winged birds, and settled about them as they slept. The moon through the rifted clouds looked down upon what had been the camp. But all human stain, all trace of earthly travail, was hidden beneath the spotless mantle mercifully flung from above.

They slept all that day and the next, nor did they waken when voices and footsteps broke the silence of the camp. And when pitying fingers brushed the snow from their wan faces, you could scarcely have told, from the equal peace that dwelt upon them, which was she that had sinned. Even the law of Poker Flat recognized this, and turned away, leaving them still locked in each other's arms.

But at the head of the gulch, on one of the largest pine-trees, they found the deuce of clubs pinned to the bark with a bowie-knife. It bore the following, written in pencil, in a firm hand:

†

BENEATH THIS TREE
LIES THE BODY
OF
JOHN OAKHURST,
WHO STRUCK A STREAK OF BAD LUCK
ON THE 23D OF NOVEMBER, 1850,
AND
HANDED IN HIS CHECKS
ON THE 7TH DECEMBER, 1850.

†

And pulseless and cold, with a derringer by his side and a bullet in his heart, though still calm as in life, beneath the snow lay he who was at once the strongest and yet the weakest of the outcasts of Poker Flat.

XII

THE THREE STRANGERS

BY

Thomas Hardy (1840)

The Three Strangers

Thomas Hardy (1840)

AMONG the few features of agricultural England which retain an appearance but little modified by the lapse of centuries, may be reckoned the high, grassy and furzy downs, coombs, or ewe-leases, as they are indifferently called, that fill a large area of certain counties in the south and southwest. If any mark of human occupation is met with hereon, it usually takes the form of the solitary cottage of some shepherd.

Fifty years ago such a lonely cottage stood on such a down, and may possibly be standing there now. In spite of its loneliness, however, the spot, by actual measurement, was not more than five miles from a county-town. Yet that affected it little. Five miles of irregular upland, during the long inimical seasons, with their sleets, snows, rains, and mists, afford withdrawing space enough to isolate a Timon or a Nebuchadnezzar; much less, in fair weather, to please that less repellent tribe, the poets, philosophers, artists, and others who "conceive and meditate of pleasant things."

Some old earthen camp or barrow, some clump of trees, at least some starved fragment of ancient hedge is usually taken advantage of in the erection of these forlorn dwellings. But, in the present case, such a kind of shelter had

[1] From *Wessex Tales*. Published by Harper & Brothers.

been disregarded. Higher Crowstairs, as the house was called, stood quite detached and undefended. The only reason for its precise situation seemed to be the crossing of two footpaths at right angles hard by, which may have crossed there and thus for a good five hundred years. Hence the house was exposed to the elements on all sides. But, though the wind up here blew unmistakably when it did blow, and the rain hit hard whenever it fell, the various weathers of the winter season were not quite so formidable on the coomb as they were imagined to be by dwellers on low ground. The raw rimes were not so pernicious as in the hollows, and the frosts were scarcely so severe. When the shepherd and his family who tenanted the house were pitied for their sufferings from the exposure, they said that upon the whole they were less inconvenienced by "wuzzes and flames" (hoarses and phlegms) than when they had lived by the stream of a snug neighboring valley.

The night of March 28, 182–, was precisely one of the nights that were wont to call forth these expressions of commiseration. The level rainstorm smote walls, slopes, and hedges like the clothyard shafts of Senlac and Crecy. Such sheep and outdoor animals as had no shelter stood with their buttocks to the winds; while the tails of little birds trying to roost on some scraggy thorn were blown inside-out like umbrellas. The gable-end of the cottage was stained with wet, and the eavesdroppings flapped against the wall. Yet never was commiseration for the shepherd more misplaced. For that cheerful rustic was entertaining a large party in glorification of the christening of his second girl.

The guests had arrived before the rain began to fall, and they were all now assembled in the chief or living room of the dwelling. A glance into the apartment at eight o'clock on this eventful evening would have re-

sulted in the opinion that it was as cosy and comfortable a nook as could be wished for in boisterous weather. The calling of its inhabitant was proclaimed by a number of highly-polished sheep crooks without stems that were hung ornamentally over the fireplace, the curl of each shining crook varying from the antiquated type engraved in the patriarchal pictures of old family Bibles to the most approved fashion of the last local sheep-fair. The room was lighted by half-a-dozen candles, having wicks only a trifle smaller than the grease which enveloped them, in candlesticks that were never used but at high-days, holy-days, and family feasts. The lights were scattered about the room, two of them standing on the chimney-piece. This position of candles was in itself significant. Candles on the chimney-piece always meant a party.

On the hearth, in front of a back-brand to give substance, blazed a fire of thorns, that crackled "like the laughter of the fool."

Nineteen persons were gathered here. Of these, five women, wearing gowns of various bright hues, sat in chairs along the wall; girls shy and not shy filled the window-bench; four men, including Charley Jake the hedge-carpenter, Elijah New the parish-clerk, and John Pitcher, a neighboring dairyman, the shepherd's father-in-law, lolled in the settle; a young man and maid, who were blushing over tentative *pourparlers* on a life-companionship, sat beneath the corner-cupboard; and an elderly engaged man of fifty or upward moved restlessly about from spots where his betrothed was not to the spot where she was. Enjoyment was pretty general, and so much the more prevailed in being unhampered by conventional restrictions. Absolute confidence in each other's good opinion begat perfect ease, while the finishing stroke

of manner, amounting to a truly princely serenity, was lent to the majority by the absence of any expression or trait denoting that they wished to get on in the world, enlarge their minds, or do any eclipsing thing whatever—which nowadays so generally nips the bloom and *bonhomie* of all except the two extremes of the social scale.

Shepherd Fennel had married well, his wife being a dairyman's daughter from a vale at a distance, who brought fifty guineas in her pocket—and kept them there, till they should be required for ministering to the needs of a coming family. This frugal woman had been somewhat exercised as to the character that should be given to the gathering. A sit-still party had its advantages; but an undisturbed position of ease in chairs and settles was apt to lead on the men to such an unconscionable deal of toping that they would sometimes fairly drink the house dry. A dancing-party was the alternative; but this, while avoiding the foregoing objection on the score of good drink, had a counterbalancing disadvantage in the matter of good victuals, the ravenous appetites engendered by the exercise causing immense havoc in the buttery. Shepherdess Fennel fell back upon the intermediate plan of mingling short dances with short periods of talk and singing, so as to hinder any ungovernable rage in either. But this scheme was entirely confined to her own gentle mind: the shepherd himself was in the mood to exhibit the most reckless phases of hospitality.

The fiddler was a boy of those parts, about twelve years of age, who had a wonderful dexterity in jigs and reels, though his fingers were so small and short as to necessitate a constant shifting for the high notes, from which he scrambled back to the first position with sounds not of unmixed purity of tone. At seven the shrill tweedle-dee of this youngster had begun, accompanied by a booming

ground-bass from Elijah New, the parish-clerk, who had thoughtfully brought with him his favorite musical instrument, the serpent. Dancing was instantaneous, Mrs. Fennel privately enjoining the players on no account to let the dance exceed the length of a quarter of an hour.

But Elijah and the boy, in the excitement of their position, quite forgot the injunction. Moreover, Oliver Giles, a man of seventeen, one of the dancers, who was enamoured of his partner, a fair girl of thirty-three rolling years, had recklessly handed a new crown-piece to the musicians, as a bribe to keep going as long as they had muscle and wind. Mrs. Fennel, seeing the steam begin to generate on the countenances of her guests, crossed over and touched the fiddler's elbow and put her hand on the serpent's mouth. But they took no notice, and fearing she might lose her character of genial hostess if she were to interfere too markedly, she retired and sat down helpless. And so the dance whizzed on with cumulative fury, the performers moving in their planet-like courses, direct and retrograde, from apogee to perigee, till the hand of the well-kicked clock at the bottom of the room had travelled over the circumference of an hour.

While these cheerful events were in course of enactment within Fennel's pastoral dwelling, an incident having considerable bearing on the party had occurred in the gloomy night without. Mrs. Fennel's concern about the growing fierceness of the dance corresponded in point of time with the ascent of a human figure to the solitary hill of Higher Crowstairs from the direction of the distant town. This personage strode on through the rain without a pause, following the little-worn path which, further on in its course, skirted the shepherd's cottage.

It was nearly the time of full moon, and on this account,

though the sky was lined with a uniform sheet of dripping cloud, ordinary objects out of doors were readily visible. The sad wan light revealed the lonely pedestrian to be a man of supple frame; his gait suggested that he had somewhat passed the period of perfect and instinctive agility, though not so far as to be otherwise than rapid of motion when occasion required. At a rough guess, he might have been about forty years of age. He appeared tall, but a recruiting sergeant, or other person accustomed to the judging of men's heights by the eye, would have discerned that this was chiefly owing to his gauntness, and that he was not more than five-feet-eight or nine.

Notwithstanding the regularity of his tread, there was caution in it, as in that of one who mentally feels his way; and despite the fact that it was not a black coat nor a dark garment of any sort that he wore, there was something about him which suggested that he naturally belonged to the black-coated tribes of men. His clothes were of fustian, and his boots hobnailed, yet in his progress he showed not the mud-accustomed bearing of hobnailed and fustianed peasantry.

By the time that he had arrived abreast of the shepherd's premises the rain came down, or rather came along, with yet more determined violence. The outskirts of the little settlement partially broke the force of wind and rain, and this induced him to stand still. The most salient of the shepherd's domestic erections was an empty sty at the forward corner of his hedgeless garden, for in these latitudes the principle of masking the homelier features of your establishment by a conventional frontage was unknown. The traveller's eye was attracted to this small building by the pallid shine of the wet slates that covered it. He turned aside, and, finding it empty, stood under the pent-roof for shelter.

While he stood, the boom of the serpent within the adjacent house, and the lesser strains of the fiddler, reached the spot as an accompaniment to the surging hiss of the flying rain on the sod, its louder beating on the cabbage-leaves of the garden, on the eight or ten beehives just discernible by the path, and its dripping from the eaves into a row of buckets and pans that had been placed under the walls of the cottage. For at Higher Crowstairs, as at all such elevated domiciles, the grand difficulty of housekeeping was an insufficiency of water; and a casual rainfall was utilized by turning out, as catchers, every utensil that the house contained. Some queer stories might be told of the contrivances for economy in suds and dishwaters that are absolutely necessitated in upland habitations during the droughts of summer. But at this season there were no such exigencies; a mere acceptance of what the skies bestowed was sufficient for an abundant store.

At last the notes of the serpent ceased and the house was silent. This cessation of activity aroused the solitary pedestrian from the reverie into which he had elapsed, and, emerging from the shed, with an apparently new intention, he walked up the path to the house-door. Arrived here, his first act was to kneel down on a large stone beside the row of vessels, and to drink a copious draught from one of them. Having quenched his thirst, he rose and lifted his hand to knock, but paused with his eye upon the panel. Since the dark surface of the wood revealed absolutely nothing, it was evident that he must be mentally looking through the door, as if he wished to measure thereby all the possibilities that a house of this sort might include, and how they might bear upon the question of his entry.

In his indecision he turned and surveyed the scene around. Not a soul was anywhere visible. The garden-path stretched downward from his feet, gleaming like the

track of a snail; the roof of the little well (mostly dry), the well-cover, the top rail of the garden-gate, were varnished with the same dull liquid glaze; while, far away in the vale, a faint whiteness of more than usual extent showed that the rivers were high in the meads. Beyond all this winked a few bleared lamplights through the beating drops—lights that denoted the situation of the county-town from which he had appeared to come. The absence of all notes of life in that direction seemed to clinch his intentions, and he knocked at the door.

Within, a desultory chat had taken the place of movement and musical sound. The hedge-carpenter was suggesting a song to the company, which nobody just then was inclined to undertake, so that the knock afforded a not unwelcome diversion.

"Walk in!" said the shepherd, promptly.

The latch clicked upward, and out of the night our pedestrian appeared upon the door-mat. The shepherd arose, snuffed two of the nearest candles, and turned to look at him.

Their light disclosed that the stranger was dark in complexion and not unprepossessing as to feature. His hat, which for a moment he did not remove, hung low over his eyes, without concealing that they were large, open, and determined, moving with a flash rather than a glance round the room. He seemed pleased with his survey, and, baring his shaggy head, said, in a rich, deep voice: "The rain is so heavy, friends, that I ask leave to come in and rest awhile."

"To be sure, stranger," said the shepherd. "And faith, you've been lucky in choosing your time, for we are having a bit of a fling for a glad cause—though, to be sure, a man could hardly wish that glad cause to happen more than once a year."

"Nor less," spoke up a woman. "For 'tis best to get your family over and done with, as soon as you can, so as to be all the earlier out of the fag o't."

"And what may be this glad cause?" asked the stranger.

"A birth and christening," said the shepherd.

The stranger hoped his host might not be made unhappy either by too many or two few of such episodes, and being invited by a gesture to a pull at the mug, he readily acquiesced. His manner, which, before entering, had been so dubious, was now altogether that of a careless and candid man.

"Late to be traipsing athwart this coomb—hey?" said the engaged man of fifty.

"Late it is, master, as you say.—I'll take a seat in the chimney-corner, if you have nothing to urge against it, ma'am; for I am a little moist on the side that was next the rain."

Mrs. Shepherd Fennel assented, and made room for the self-invited comer, who, having got completely inside the chimney-corner, stretched out his legs and arms with the expansiveness of a person quite at home.

"Yes, I am rather cracked in the vamp," he said freely, seeing that the eyes of the shepherd's wife fell upon his boots, "and I am not well fitted either. I have had some rough times lately, and have been forced to pick up what I can get in the way of wearing, but I must find a suit better fit for working-days when I reach home."

"One of hereabouts?" she inquired.

"Not quite that—further up the country."

"I thought so. And so be I; and by your tongue you come from my neighborhood."

"But you would hardly have heard of me," he said quickly. "My time would be long before yours, ma'am you see."

This testimony to the youthfulness of his hostess had the effect of stopping her cross-examination.

"There is only one thing more wanted to make me happy," continued the new-comer, "and that is a little baccy, which I am sorry to say I am out of."

"I'll fill your pipe," said the shepherd.

"I must ask you to lend me a pipe likewise."

"A smoker, and no pipe about 'ee?"

"I have dropped it somewhere on the road."

The shepherd filled and handed him a new clay pipe, saying, as he did so, "Hand me your baccy-box—I'll fill that too, now I am about it."

The man went through the movement of searching his pockets.

"Lost that too?" said his entertainer, with some surprise.

"I am afraid so," said the man with some confusion. "Give it to me in a screw of paper." Lighting his pipe at the candle with a suction that drew the whole flame into the bowl, he resettled himself in the corner and bent his looks upon the faint steam from his damp legs, as if he wished to say no more.

Meanwhile the general body of guests had been taking little notice of this visitor by reason of an absorbing discussion in which they were engaged with the band about a tune for the next dance. The matter being settled, they were about to stand up when an interruption came in the shape of another knock at the door.

At sound of the same the man in the chimney-corner took up the poker and began stirring the brands as if doing it thoroughly were the one aim of his existence; and a second time the shepherd said, "Walk in!" In a moment another man stood upon the straw-woven door-mat. He too was a stranger.

This individual was one of a type radically different

from the first. There was more of the commonplace in his manner, and a certain jovial cosmopolitanism sat upon his features. He was several years older than the first arrival, his hair being slightly frosted, his eyebrows bristly, and his whiskers cut back from his cheeks. His face was rather full and flabby, and yet it was not altogether a face without power. A few grog-blossoms marked the neighborhood of his nose. He flung back his long drab greatcoat, revealing that beneath it he wore a suit of cinder-gray shade throughout, large heavy seals, of some metal or other that would take a polish, dangling from his fob as his only personal ornament. Shaking the water-drops from his low-crowned glazed hat, he said, "I must ask for a few minutes' shelter, comrades, or I shall be wetted to my skin before I get to Casterbridge."

"Make yourself at home, master," said the shepherd, perhaps a trifle less heartily than on the first occasion. Not that Fennel had the least tinge of niggardliness in his composition; but the room was far from large, spare chairs were not numerous, and damp companions were not altogether desirable at close quarters for the women and girls in their bright-colored gowns.

However, the second comer, after taking off his greatcoat, and hanging his hat on a nail in one of the ceiling-beams as if he had been specially invited to put it there, advanced and sat down at the table. This had been pushed so closely into the chimney-corner, to give all available room to the dancers, that its inner edge grazed the elbow of the man who had ensconced himself by the fire; and thus the two strangers were brought into close companionship. They nodded to each other by way of breaking the ice of unacquaintance, and the first stranger handed his neighbor the family mug—a huge vessel of brown ware, having its upper edge worn away like a threshold by the

rub of whole generations of thirsty lips that had gone the way of all flesh, and bearing the following inscription burnt upon its rotund side in yellow letters:

THERE IS NO FUN
UNTILL I CUM.

The other man, nothing loth, raised the mug to his lips, and drank on, and on, and on—till a curious blueness overspread the countenance of the shepherd's wife, who had regarded with no little surprise the first stranger's free offer to the second of what did not belong to him to dispense.

"I knew it!" said the toper to the shepherd with much satisfaction. "When I walked up your garden before coming in, and saw the hives all of a row, I said to myself, 'Where there's bees there's honey, and where there's honey there's mead.' But mead of such a truly comfortable sort as this I really didn't expect to meet in my older days." He took yet another pull at the mug, till it assumed an ominous elevation.

"Glad you enjoy it!" said the shepherd warmly.

"It is goodish mead," assented Mrs. Fennel, with an absence of enthusiasm which seemed to say that it was possible to buy praise for one's cellar at too heavy a price. "It is trouble enough to make—and really I hardly think we shall make any more. For honey sells well, and we ourselves can make shift with a drop o' small mead and metheglin for common use from the comb-washings."

"O, but you'll never have the heart!" reproachfully cried the stranger in cinder-gray, after taking up the mug a third time and setting it down empty. "I love mead, when 'tis old like this, as I love to go to church o' Sundays, or to relieve the needy any day of the week."

"Ha, ha, ha!" said the man in the chimney-corner, who, in spite of the taciturnity induced by the pipe of tobacco, could not or would not refrain from this slight testimony to his comrade's humor.

Now the old mead of those days, brewed of the purest first-year or maiden honey, four pounds to the gallon—with its due complement of white of eggs, cinnamon, ginger, cloves, mace, rosemary, yeast, and processes of working, bottling, and cellaring—tasted remarkably strong; but it did not taste so strong as it actually was. Hence, presently, the stranger in cinder-gray at the table, moved by its creeping influence, unbuttoned his waistcoat, threw himself back in his chair, spread his legs, and made his presence felt in various ways.

"Well, well, as I say," he resumed, "I am going to Casterbridge, and to Casterbridge I must go. I should have been almost there by this time; but the rain drove me into your dwelling, and I'm not sorry for it."

"You don't live in Casterbridge?" said the shepherd.

"Not as yet; though I shortly mean to move there."

"Going to set up in trade, perhaps?"

"No, no," said the shepherd's wife. "It is easy to see that the gentleman is rich, and don't want to work at anything."

The cinder-gray stranger paused, as if to consider whether he would accept that definition of himself. He presently rejected it by answering, "Rich is not quite the word for me, dame. I do work, and I must work. And even if I only get to Casterbridge by midnight I must begin work there at eight to-morrow morning. Yes, het or wet, blow or snow, famine or sword, my day's work to-morrow must be done."

"Poor man! Then, in spite o' seeming, you be worse off than we," replied the shepherd's wife.

"'Tis the nature of my trade, men and maidens. 'Tis the nature of my trade more than my poverty. . . . But really and truly I must up and off, or I shan't get a lodging in the town." However, the speaker did not move, and directly added, "There's time for one more draught of friendship before I go; and I'd perform it at once if the mug were not dry."

"Here's a mug o' small," said Mrs. Fennel. "Small, we call it, though to be sure 'tis only the first wash o' the combs."

"No," said the stranger, disdainfully. "I won't spoil your first kindness by partaking o' your second."

"Certainly not," broke in Fennel. "We don't increase and multiply every day, and I'll fill the mug again." He went away to the dark place under the stairs where the barrel stood. The shepherdess followed him.

"Why should you do this?" she said, reproachfully, as soon as they were alone. "He's emptied it once, though it held enough for ten people; and now he's not contented wi' the small, but must needs call for more o' the strong! And a stranger unbeknown to any of us. For my part, I don't like the look o' the man at all."

"But he's in the house, my honey; and 'tis a wet night, and a christening. Daze it, what's a cup of mead more or less? There 'll be plenty more next bee-burning."

"Very well—this time, then," she answered, looking wistfully at the barrel. "But what is the man's calling, and where is he one of, that he should come in and join us like this?"

"I don't know. I'll ask him again."

The catastrophe of having the mug drained dry at one pull by the stranger in cinder-gray was effectually guarded against this time by Mrs. Fennel. She poured out his allowance in a small cup, keeping the large one at a discreet

distance from him. When he had tossed off his portion the shepherd renewed his inquiry about the stranger's occupation.

The latter did not immediately reply, and the man in the chimney-corner, with sudden demonstrativeness, said, "Anybody may know my trade—I'm a wheelwright."

"A very good trade for these parts," said the shepherd.

"And anybody may know mine—if they've the sense to find it out," said the stranger in cinder-gray.

"You may generally tell what a man is by his claws," observed the hedge-carpenter, looking at his own hands. "My fingers be as full of thorns as an old pin-cushion is of pins."

The hands of the man in the chimney-corner instinctively sought the shade, and he gazed into the fire as he resumed his pipe. The man at the table took up the hedge-carpenter's remark, and added smartly, "True; but the oddity of my trade is that, instead of setting a mark upon me, it sets a mark upon my customers."

No observation being offered by anybody in elucidation of this enigma, the shepherd's wife once more called for a song. The same obstacles presented themselves as at the former time—one had no voice, another had forgotten the first verse. The stranger at the table, whose soul had now risen to a good working temperature, relieved the difficulty by exclaiming that, to start the company, he would sing himself. Thrusting one thumb into the arm-hole of his waistcoat, he waved the other hand in the air, and, with an extemporizing gaze at the shining sheep-crooks above the mantelpiece, began:

"O my trade it is the rarest one,
Simple shepherds all—
My trade is a sight to see;
For my customers I tie, and take them up on high,
And waft 'em to a far countree!"

The room was silent when he had finished the verse—with one exception, that of the man in the chimney-corner, who, at the singer's word, "Chorus!" joined him in a deep bass voice of musical relish:

"And waft 'em to a far countree!"

Oliver Giles, John Pitcher the dairyman, the parish-clerk, the engaged man of fifty, the row of young women against the wall, seemed lost in thought not of the gayest kind. The shepherd looked meditatively on the ground, the shepherdess gazed keenly at the singer, and with some suspicion; she was doubting whether this stranger were merely singing an old song from recollection, or was composing one there and then for the occasion. All were as perplexed at the obscure revelation as the guests at Belshazzar's Feast, except the man in the chimney-corner, who quietly said, "Second verse, stranger," and smoked on.

The singer thoroughly moistened himself from his lips inward, and went on with the next stanza as requested:

"My tools are but common ones,
Simple shepherds all—
My tools are no sight to see:
A little hempen string, and a post whereon to swing,
Are implements enough for me!"

Shepherd Fennel glanced round. There was no longer any doubt that the stranger was answering his question rhythmically. The guests one and all started back with suppressed exclamations. The young woman engaged to the man of fifty fainted half-way, and would have proceeded, but finding him wanting in alacrity for catching her she sat down trembling.

"O, he's the ——!" whispered the people in the background, mentioning the name of an ominous public officer.

"He's come to do it! 'Tis to be at Casterbridge jail to-morrow—the man for sheep-stealing—the poor clock-maker we heard of, who used to live away at Shottsford and had no work to do—Timothy Summers, whose family were a-starving, and so he went out of Shottsford by the high-road, and took a sheep in open daylight, defying the farmer and the farmer's wife and the farmer's lad, and every man jack among 'em. He" (and they nodded toward the stranger of the deadly trade) "is come from up the country to do it because there's not enough to do in his own county-town, and he's got the place here now our own county man's dead; he's going to live in the same cottage under the prison wall."

The stranger in cinder-gray took no notice of this whispered string of observations, but again wetted his lips. Seeing that his friend in the chimney-corner was the only one who reciprocated his joviality in any way, he held out his cup toward that appreciative comrade, who also held out his own. They clinked together, the eyes of the rest of the room hanging upon the singer's actions. He parted his lips for the third verse; but at that moment another knock was audible upon the door. This time the knock was faint and hesitating.

The company seemed scared; the shepherd looked with consternation toward the entrance, and it was with some effort that he resisted his alarmed wife's deprecatory glance, and uttered for the third time the welcoming words, "Walk in!"

The door was gently opened, and another man stood upon the mat. He, like those who had preceded him, was a stranger. This time it was a short, small personage, of fair complexion, and dressed in a decent suit of dark clothes.

"Can you tell me the way to—?" he began: when,

gazing round the room to observe the nature of the company among whom he had fallen, his eyes lighted on the stranger in cinder-gray. It was just at the instant when the latter, who had thrown his mind into his song with such a will that he scarcely heeded the interruption, silenced all whispers and inquiries by bursting into his third verse:

"To-morrow is my working day,
Simple shepherds all—
To-morrow is a working day for me:
For the farmer's sheep is slain, and the lad who did it ta'en,
And on his soul may God ha' merc-y!"

The stranger in the chimney-corner, waving cups with the singer so heartily that his mead splashed over on the hearth, repeated in his bass voice as before:

"And on his soul may God ha' merc-y!"

All this time the third stranger had been standing in the doorway. Finding now that he did not come forward or go on speaking, the guests particularly regarded him. They noticed to their surprise that he stood before them the picture of abject terror—his knees trembling, his hand shaking so violently that the door-latch by which he supported himself rattled audibly: his white lips were parted, and his eyes fixed on the merry officer of justice in the middle of the room. A moment more and he had turned, closed the door, and fled.

"What a man can it be?" said the shepherd.

The rest, between the awfulness of their late discovery and the odd conduct of this third visitor, looked as if they knew not what to think, and said nothing. Instinctively they withdrew further and further from the

grim gentleman in their midst, whom some of them seemed to take for the Prince of Darkness himself, till they formed a remote circle, an empty space of floor being left between them and him—

". . . circulus, cujus centrum diabolus."

The room was so silent—though there were more than twenty people in it—that nothing could be heard but the patter of the rain against the window-shutters, accompanied by the occasional hiss of a stray drop that fell down the chimney into the fire, and the steady puffing of the man in the corner, who had now resumed his pipe of long clay.

The stillness was unexpectedly broken. The distant sound of a gun reverberated through the air—apparently from the direction of the county-town.

"Be jiggered!" cried the stranger who had sung the song, jumping up.

"What does that mean?" asked several.

"A prisoner escaped from the jail—that's what it means."

All listened. The sound was repeated, and none of them spoke but the man in the chimney-corner, who said quietly, "I've often been told that in this county they fire a gun at such times; but I never heard it till now."

"I wonder if it is *my* man?" murmured the personage in cinder-gray.

"Surely it is!" said the shepherd involuntarily. "And surely we've zeed him! That little man who looked in at the door by now, and quivered like a leaf when he zeed ye and heard your song!"

"His teeth chattered, and the breath went out of his body," said the dairyman.

"And his heart seemed to sink within him like a stone," said Oliver Giles.

"And he bolted as if he'd been shot at," said the hedge-carpenter.

"True—his teeth chattered, and his heart seemed to sink; and he bolted as if he'd been shot at," slowly summed up the man in the chimney-corner.

"I didn't notice it," remarked the hangman.

"We were all a-wondering what made him run off in such a fright," faltered one of the women against the wall, "and now 'tis explained!"

The firing of the alarm-gun went on at intervals, low and sullenly, and their suspicions became a certainty. The sinister gentleman in cinder-gray roused himself. "Is there a constable here?" he asked, in thick tones. "If so, let him step forward."

The engaged man of fifty stepped quavering out from the wall, his betrothed beginning to sob on the back of the chair.

"You are a sworn constable?"

"I be, sir."

"Then pursue the criminal at once, with assistance, and bring him back here. He can't have gone far."

"I will, sir, I will—when I've got my staff. I'll go home and get it, and come sharp here, and start in a body."

"Staff!—never mind your staff; the man 'll be gone!"

"But I can't do nothing without my staff—can I, William, and John, and Charles Jake? No; for there's the king's royal crown a-painted on en in yaller and gold, and the lion and the unicorn, so as when I raise en up and hit my prisoner, 'tis made a lawful blow thereby. I wouldn't 'tempt to take up a man without my staff—no, not I. If I hadn't the law to gie me courage, why, instead o' my taking up him he might take up me!"

"Now, I'm a king's man myself, and can give you authority enough for this," said the formidable officer in gray. "Now then, all of ye, be ready. Have ye any lanterns?"

"Yes—have ye any lanterns?—I demand it!" said the constable.

"And the rest of you able-bodied—"

"Able-bodied men—yes—the rest of ye!" said the constable.

"Have you some good stout staves and pitchforks—"

"Staves and pitchforks—in the name o' the law! And take 'em in yer hands and go in quest, and do as we in authority tell ye!"

Thus aroused, the men prepared to give chase. The evidence was, indeed, though circumstantial, so convincing, that but little argument was needed to show the shepherd's guests that after what they had seen it would look very much like connivance if they did not instantly pursue the unhappy third stranger, who could not as yet have gone more than a few hundred yards over such uneven country.

A shepherd is always well provided with lanterns; and, lighting these hastily, and with hurdle-staves in their hands, they poured out of the door, taking a direction along the crest of the hill, away from the town, the rain having fortunately a little abated.

Disturbed by the noise, or possibly by unpleasant dreams of her baptism, the child who had been christened began to cry heart-brokenly in the room overhead. These notes of grief came down through the chinks of the floor to the ears of the women below, who jumped up one by one, and seemed glad of the excuse to ascend and comfort the baby, for the incidents of the last half-hour greatly oppressed them. Thus in the space of two or three minutes the room on the ground-floor was deserted quite.

But it was not for long. Hardly had the sound of footsteps died away when a man returned round the corner of the house from the direction the pursuers had taken. Peeping in at the door, and seeing nobody there, he entered leisurely. It was the stranger of the chimney-corner, who had gone out with the rest. The motive of his return was shown by his helping himself to a cut piece of skimmer-cake that lay on a ledge beside where he had sat, and which he had apparently forgotten to take with him. He also poured out half a cup more mead from the quantity that remained, ravenously eating and drinking these as he stood. He had not finished when another figure came in just as quietly—his friend in cinder-gray.

"O—you here?" said the latter, smiling. "I thought you had gone to help in the capture." And this speaker also revealed the object of his return by looking solicitously round for the fascinating mug of old mead.

"And I thought you had gone," said the other, continuing his skimmer-cake with some effort.

"Well, on second thoughts, I felt there were enough without me," said the first confidentially, "and such a night as it is, too. Besides, 'tis the business o' the Government to take care of its criminals—not mine."

"True; so it is. And I felt as you did, that there were enough without me."

"I don't want to break my limbs running over the humps and hollows of this wild country."

"Nor I neither, between you and me."

"These shepherd-people are used to it—simple-minded souls, you know, stirred up to anything in a moment. They'll have him ready for me before the morning, and no trouble to me at all."

"They'll have him, and we shall have saved ourselves all labor in the matter."

"True, true. Well, my way is to Casterbridge; and 'tis as much as my legs will do to take me that far. Going the same way?"

"No, I am sorry to say! I have to get home over there" (he nodded indefinitely to the right), "and I feel as you do, that it is quite enough for my legs to do before bedtime."

The other had by this time finished the mead in the mug, after which, shaking hands heartily at the door, and wishing each other well, they went their several ways.

In the meantime the company of pursuers had reached the end of the hog's-back elevation which dominated this part of the down. They had decided on no particular plan of action; and, finding that the man of the baleful trade was no longer in their company, they seemed quite unable to form any such plan now. They descended in all directions down the hill, and straightway several of the party fell into the snare set by Nature for all misguided midnight ramblers over this part of the cretaceous formation. The "lanchets," or flint slopes, which belted the escarpment at intervals of a dozen yards, took the less cautious ones unawares, and losing their footing on the rubbly steep they slid sharply downward, the lanterns rolling from their hands to the bottom, and there lying on their sides till the horn was scorched through.

When they had again gathered themselves together, the shepherd, as the man who knew the country best, took the lead, and guided them round these treacherous inclines. The lanterns, which seemed rather to dazzle their eyes and warn the fugitive than to assist them in the exploration, were extinguished, due silence was observed; and in this more rational order they plunged into the vale. It was a grassy, briery, moist defile, affording some shelter to any person who had sought it; but the party perambulated it

in vain, and ascended on the other side. Here they wandered apart, and after an interval closed together again to report progress. At the second time of closing in they found themselves near a lonely ash, the single tree on this part of the coomb, probably sown there by a passing bird some fifty years before. And here, standing a little to one side of the trunk, as motionless as the trunk itself, appeared the man they were in quest of, his outline being well defined against the sky beyond. The band noiselessly drew up and faced him.

"Your money or your life!" said the constable sternly to the still figure.

"No, no," whispered John Pitcher. "'Tisn't our side ought to say that. That's the doctrine of vagabonds like him, and we be on the side of the law."

"Well, well," replied the constable, impatiently; "I must say something, mustn't I? and if you had all the weight o' this undertaking upon your mind, perhaps you'd say the wrong thing, too!—Prisoner at the bar, surrender, in the name of the Father—the Crown, I mane!"

The man under the tree seemed now to notice them for the first time, and, giving them no opportunity whatever for exhibiting their courage, he strolled slowly toward them. He was, indeed, the little man, the third stranger; but his trepidation had in a great measure gone.

"Well, travellers," he said, "did I hear you speak to me?"

"You did; you've got to come and be our prisoner at once!" said the constable. "We arrest 'ee on the charge of not biding in Casterbridge jail in a decent proper manner to be hung to-morrow morning. Neighbors, do your duty, and seize the culpet!"

On hearing the charge, the man seemed enlightened, and, saying not another word, resigned himself with preter-

natural civility to the search-party, who, with their staves in their hands, surrounded him on all sides, and marched him back toward the shepherd's cottage.

It was eleven o'clock by the time they arrived. The light shining from the open door, a sound of men's voices within, proclaimed to them as they approached the house that some new events had arisen in their absence. On entering they discovered the shepherd's living-room to be invaded by two officers from Casterbridge jail, and a well-known magistrate who lived at the nearest country-seat, intelligence of the escape having become generally circulated.

"Gentlemen," said the constable, "I have brought back your man—not without risk and danger; but every one must do his duty! He is inside this circle of able-bodied persons, who have lent me useful aid, considering their ignorance of Crown work. Men, bring forward your prisoner!" And the third stranger was led to the light.

"Who is this?" said one of the officials.

"The man," said the constable.

"Certainly not," said the turnkey; and the first corroborated his statement.

"But how can it be otherwise?" asked the constable. "Or why was he so terrified at sight o' the singing instrument of the law who sat there?" Here he related the strange behavior of the third stranger on entering the house during the hangman's song.

"Can't understand it," said the officer coolly. "All I know is that it is not the condemned man. He's quite a different character from this one; a gauntish fellow, with dark hair and eyes, rather good-looking, and with a musical bass voice that if you heard it once you'd never mistake as long as you lived."

"Why, souls—'twas the man in the chimney-corner!"

"Hey—what?" said the magistrate, coming forward after inquiring particulars from the shepherd in the background. "Haven't you got the man after all?"

"Well, sir," said the constable, "he's the man we were in search of, that's true; and yet he's not the man we were in search of. For the man we were in search of was not the man we wanted, sir, if you understand my every-day way; for 'twas the man in the chimney-corner!"

"A pretty kettle of fish altogether!" said the magistrate. "You had better start for the other man at once."

The prisoner now spoke for the first time. The mention of the man in the chimney-corner seemed to have moved him as nothing else could do. "Sir," he said, stepping forward to the magistrate, "take no more trouble about me. The time is come when I may as well speak. I have done nothing; my crime is that the condemned man is my brother. Early this afternoon I left home at Shottsford to tramp it all the way to Casterbridge jail to bid him farewell. I was benighted, and called here to rest and ask the way. When I opened the door I saw before me the very man, my brother, that I thought to see in the condemned cell at Casterbridge. He was in this chimney-corner; and jammed close to him, so that he could not have got out if he had tried, was the executioner who'd come to take his life, singing a song about it and not knowing that it was his victim who was close by, joining in to save appearances. My brother looked a glance of agony at me, and I know he meant, 'Don't reveal what you see; my life depends on it.' I was so terror-struck that I could hardly stand, and, not knowing what I did, I turned and hurried away."

The narrator's manner and tone had the stamp of truth, and his story made a great impression on all around.

"And do you know where your brother is at the present time?" asked the magistrate.

"I do not. I have never seen him since I closed this door."

"I can testify to that, for we've been between ye ever since," said the constable.

"Where does he think to fly to?—what is his occupation?"

"He's a watch-and-clock-maker, sir."

"'A said 'a was a wheelwright—a wicked rogue," said the constable.

"The wheels of clocks and watches he meant, no doubt," said Shepherd Fennel. "I thought his hands were palish for's trade."

"Well, it appears to me that nothing can be gained by retaining this poor man in custody," said the magistrate; "your business lies with the other, unquestionably."

And so the little man was released off-hand; but he looked nothing the less sad on that account, it being beyond the power of magistrate or constable to raze out the written troubles in his brain, for they concerned another whom he regarded with more solicitude than himself. When this was done, and the man had gone his way, the night was found to be so far advanced that it was deemed useless to renew the search before the next morning.

Next day, accordingly, the quest for the clever sheep-stealer became general and keen, to all appearance at least. But the intended punishment was cruelly disproportioned to the transgression, and the sympathy of a great many country-folk in that district was strongly on the side of the fugitive. Moreover, his marvellous coolness and daring in hob-and-nobbing with the hangman, under the unprecedented circumstances of the shepherd's party, won their admiration. So that it may be

questioned if all those who ostensibly made themselves so busy in exploring woods and fields and lanes were quite so thorough when it came to the private examination of their own lofts and outhouses. Stories were afloat of a mysterious figure being occasionally seen in some old overgrown trackway or other, remote from turnpike roads; but when a search was instituted in any of these suspected quarters nobody was found. Thus the days and weeks passed without tidings.

In brief, the bass-voiced man of the chimney-corner was never recaptured. Some said that he went across the sea, others that he did not, but buried himself in the depths of a populous city. At any rate, the gentleman in cinder-gray never did his morning's work at Casterbridge, nor met anywhere at all, for business purposes, the genial comrade with whom he had passed an hour of relaxation in the lonely house on the coomb.

The grass has long been green on the graves of Shepherd Fennel and his frugal wife; the guests who made up the christening party have mainly followed their entertainers to the tomb; the baby in whose honor they all had met is a matron in the sere and yellow leaf. But the arrival of the three strangers at the shepherd's that night, and the details connected therewith, is a story as well-known as ever in the country about Higher Crowstairs.

March, 1883.

XIII

JULIA BRIDE

BY

Henry James (1843)

Julia Bride[1]

Henry James (1843)

I

SHE had walked with her friend to the top of the wide steps of the Museum, those that descended from the galleries of painting, and then, after the young man had left her, smiling, looking back, waving all gayly and expressively his hat and stick, had watched him, smiling too, but with a different intensity—had kept him in sight till he passed out of the great door. She might have been waiting to see if he would turn there for a last demonstration; which was exactly what he did, renewing his cordial gesture and with his look of glad devotion, the radiance of his young face, reaching her across the great space, as she felt, in undiminished truth. Yes, so she could feel, and she remained a minute even after he was gone; she gazed at the empty air as if he had filled it still, asking herself what more she wanted and what, if it didn't signify glad devotion, his whole air could have represented.

She was at present so anxious that she could wonder if he stepped and smiled like that for mere relief at separation; yet if he desired in that degree to break the spell and escape the danger why did he keep coming back to

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her, and why, for that matter, had she felt safe a moment before in letting him go? She felt safe, felt almost reckless—that was the proof—so long as he was with her; but the chill came as soon as he had gone, when she took the measure, instantly, of all she yet missed. She might now have been taking it afresh, by the testimony of her charming clouded eyes and of the rigor that had already replaced her beautiful play of expression. Her radiance, for the minute, had "carried" as far as his, travelling on the light wings of her brilliant prettiness—he, on his side, not being facially handsome, but only sensitive, clean and eager. Then, with its extinction, the sustaining wings dropped and hung.

She wheeled about, however, full of a purpose; she passed back through the pictured rooms, for it pleased her, this idea of a talk with Mr. Pitman—as much, that is, as anything could please a young person so troubled. It happened indeed that when she saw him rise at sight of her from the settee where he had told her five minutes before that she would find him, it was just with her nervousness that his presence seemed, as through an odd suggestion of help, to connect itself. Nothing truly would be quite so odd for her case as aid proceeding from Mr. Pitman; unless perhaps the oddity would be even greater for himself—the oddity of her having taken into her head an appeal to him.

She had had to feel alone with a vengeance—inwardly alone and miserably alarmed—to be ready to "meet," that way, at the first sign from him, the successor to her dim father in her dim father's lifetime, the second of her mother's two divorced husbands. It made a queer relation for her; a relation that struck her at this moment as less edifying, less natural and graceful than it would have been even for her remarkable mother—and still in spite

of this parent's third marriage, her union with Mr. Connery, from whom she was informally separated. It was at the back of Julia's head as she approached Mr. Pitman, or it was at least somewhere deep within her soul, that if this last of Mrs. Connery's withdrawals from the matrimonial yoke had received the sanction of the court (Julia had always heard, from far back, so much about the "Court") she herself, as after a fashion, in that event, a party to it, would not have had the cheek to make up—which was how she inwardly phrased what she was doing—to the long, lean, loose, slightly cadaverous gentleman who was a memory, for her, of the period from her twelfth to her seventeenth year. She had got on with him, perversely, much better than her mother had, and the bulging misfit of his duck waistcoat, with his trick of swinging his eye-glass, at the end of an extraordinarily long string, far over the scene, came back to her as positive features of the image of her remoter youth. Her present age—for her later time had seen so many things happen—gave her a perspective.

Fifty things came up as she stood there before him, some of them floating in from the past, others hovering with freshness: how she used to dodge the rotary movement made by his pince-nez while he always awkwardly, and kindly, and often funnily, talked—it had once hit her rather badly in the eye; how she used to pull down and straighten his waistcoat, making it set a little better, a thing of a sort her mother never did; how friendly and familiar she must have been with him for that, or else a forward little minx; how she felt almost capable of doing it again now, just to sound the right note, and how sure she was of the way he would take it if she did; how much nicer he had clearly been, all the while, poor dear man, than his wife and the court had made it possible for him

publicly to appear; how much younger, too, he now looked, in spite of his rather melancholy, his mildly jaundiced, humorously determined sallowness and his careless assumption, everywhere, from his forehead to his exposed and relaxed blue socks, almost sky-blue, as in past days, of creases and folds and furrows that would have been perhaps tragic if they hadn't seemed rather to show, like his whimsical black eyebrows, the vague, interrogative arch.

Of course he wasn't wretched if he wasn't more sure of his wretchedness than that! Julia Bride would have been sure—had she been through what she supposed *he* had! With his thick, loose black hair, in any case, untouched by a thread of gray, and his kept gift of a certain big-boyish awkwardness—that of his taking their encounter, for instance, so amusedly, so crudely, though, as she was not unaware, so eagerly too—he could by no means have been so little his wife's junior as it had been that lady's habit, after the divorce, to represent him. Julia had remembered him as old, since she had so constantly thought of her mother as old; which Mrs. Connery was indeed now —for her daughter—with her dozen years of actual seniority to Mr. Pitman and her exquisite hair, the densest, the finest tangle of arranged silver tendrils that had ever enhanced the effect of a preserved complexion.

Something in the girl's vision of her quondam stepfather as still comparatively young—with the confusion, the immense element of rectification, not to say of rank disproof, that it introduced into Mrs. Connery's favorite picture of her own injured past—all this worked, even at the moment, to quicken once more the clearness and harshness of judgment, the retrospective disgust, as she might have called it, that had of late grown up in her, the sense of all the folly and vanity and vulgarity, the lies, the per-

versities, the falsification of all life in the interest of who could say what wretched frivolity, what preposterous policy, amid which she had been condemned so ignorantly, so pitifully to sit, to walk, to grope, to flounder, from the very dawn of her consciousness. Didn't poor Mr. Pitman just touch the sensitive nerve of it when, taking her in with his facetious, cautious eyes, he spoke to her, right out, of the old, old story, the everlasting little wonder of her beauty?

"Why, you know, you've grown up so lovely—you're the prettiest girl I've ever seen!" Of course she was the prettiest girl he had ever seen; she was the prettiest girl people much more privileged than he had ever seen; since when hadn't she been passing for the prettiest girl any one had ever seen? She had lived in that, from far back, from year to year, from day to day and from hour to hour—she had lived for it and literally *by* it, as who should say; but Mr. Pitman was somehow more illuminating than he knew, with the present lurid light that he cast upon old dates, old pleas, old values, and old mysteries, not to call them old abysses: it had rolled over her in a swift wave, with the very sight of him, that her mother couldn't possibly have been right about him—as about what in the world had she ever been right?—so that in fact he was simply offered her there as one more of Mrs. Connery's lies. She might have thought she knew them all by this time; but he represented for her, coming in just as he did, a fresh discovery, and it was this contribution of freshness that made her somehow feel she liked him. It was she herself who, for so long, with her retained impression, had been right about him; and the rectification he represented had *all* shone out of him, ten minutes before, on his catching her eye while she moved through the room with Mr. French. She had never doubted of his probable faults—

which her mother had vividly depicted as the basest of vices; since some of them, and the most obvious (not the vices, but the faults) were written on him as he stood there: notably, for instance, the exasperating "business slackness" of which Mrs. Connery had, before the tribunal, made so pathetically much. It might have been, for that matter, the very business slackness that affected Julia as presenting its friendly breast, in the form of a cool loose sociability, to her own actual tension; though it was also true for her, after they had exchanged fifty words, that he had as well his inward fever and that, if he was perhaps wondering what was so particularly the matter with her, she could make out not less that something was the matter with *him.* It had been vague, yet it had been intense, the mute reflection, "Yes, I'm going to like him, and he's going somehow to help me!" that had directed her steps so straight to him. She was sure even then of this, that he wouldn't put to her a query about his former wife, that he took to-day no grain of interest in Mrs. Connery; that his interest, such as it was—and he couldn't look *quite* like that, to Julia Bride's expert perception, without something in the nature of a new one—would be a thousand times different.

It was as a value of *disproof* that his worth meanwhile so rapidly grew: the good sight of him, the good sound and sense of him, such as they were, demolished at a stroke so blessedly much of the horrid inconvenience of the past that she thought of him, she clutched at him, for a *general* saving use, an application as sanative, as redemptive as some universal healing wash, precious even to the point of perjury if perjury should be required. That was the terrible thing, that had been the inward pang with which she watched Basil French recede: perjury would have to come in somehow and somewhere—oh so

quite certainly!—before the so strange, so rare young man, truly smitten though she believed him, could be made to rise to the occasion, before her measureless prize could be assured. It was present to her, it had been present a hundred times, that if there had only been some one to (as it were) "deny everything" the situation might yet be saved. She so needed some one to lie for her—ah, she so need some one to lie! Her mother's version of everything, her mother's version of anything, had been at the best, as they said, discounted; and she herself could but show, of course, for an interested party, however much she might claim to be none the less a decent girl—to whatever point, that is, after all that had both remotely and recently happened, presumptions of anything to be called decency could come in.

After what had recently happened—the two or three indirect but so worrying questions Mr. French had put to her—it would only be some thoroughly detached friend or witness who might effectively testify. An odd form of detachment certainly would reside, for Mr. Pitman's evidential character, in her mother's having so publicly and so brilliantly—though, thank the powers, all off in North Dakota!—severed their connection with him; and yet mightn't it do *her* some good, even if the harm it might do her mother were so little ambiguous? The more her mother had got divorced—with her dreadful cheap-and-easy second performance in that line and her present extremity of alienation from Mr. Connery, which enfolded beyond doubt the germ of a third petition on one side or the other—the more her mother had distinguished herself in the field of folly the worse for her own prospect with the Frenches, whose minds she had guessed to be accessible, and with such an effect of dissimulated suddenness, to some insidious poison.

It was very unmistakable, in other words, that the more dismissed and detached Mr. Pitman should have come to appear, the more as divorced, or at least as divorcing, his before-time wife would by the same stroke figure—so that it was here poor Julia could but lose herself. The crazy divorces only, or the half-dozen successive and still crazier engagements only—gathered fruit, bitter fruit, of her own incredibly allowed, her own insanely fostered frivolity—either of these two groups of skeletons at the banquet might singly be dealt with; but the combination, the fact of each party's having been so mixed-up with whatever was least presentable for the other, the fact of their having so shockingly amused themselves together, made all present steering resemble the classic middle course between Scylla and Charybdis.

It was not, however, that she felt wholly a fool in having obeyed this impulse to pick up again her kind old friend. *She* at least had never divorced him, and her horrid little filial evidence in court had been but the chatter of a parrakeet, of precocious plumage and croak, repeating words earnestly taught her, and that she could scarce even pronounce. Therefore, as far as steering went, he *must* for the hour take a hand. She might actually have wished in fact that he shouldn't now have seemed so tremendously struck with her; since it was an extraordinary situation for a girl, this crisis of her fortune, this positive wrong that the flagrancy, what she would have been ready to call the very vulgarity, of her good looks might do her at a moment when it was vital she should hang as straight as a picture on the wall. Had it ever yet befallen any young woman in the world to wish with secret intensity that she might have been, for her convenience, a shade less inordinately pretty? She had come to that, to this view of the bane, the primal curse, of their lavish physical outfit,

which had included everything and as to which she lumped herself resentfully with her mother. The only thing was that her mother was, thank goodness, still so much prettier, still so assertively, so publicly, so trashily, so ruinously pretty. Wonderful the small grimness with which Julia Bride put off on this parent the middle-aged maximum of their case and the responsibility of their defect. It cost her so little to recognize in Mrs. Connery at forty-seven, and in spite, or perhaps indeed just by reason, of the arranged silver tendrils which were so like some rare bird's-nest in a morning frost, a facile supremacy for the dazzling effect—it cost her so little that her view even rather exaggerated the lustre of the different maternal items. She would have put it *all* off if possible, all off on other shoulders and on other graces and other morals than her own, the burden of physical charm that had made so easy a ground, such a native favoring air, for the aberrations which, apparently inevitable and without far consequences at the time, had yet at this juncture so much better not have been.

She could have worked it out at her leisure, to the last link of the chain, the way their prettiness had set them trap after trap, all along—had foredoomed them to awful ineptitude. When you were as pretty as that you could, by the whole idiotic consensus, be nothing *but* pretty; and when you were nothing "but" pretty you could get into nothing but tight places, out of which you could then scramble by nothing but masses of fibs. And there was no one, all the while, who wasn't eager to egg you on, eager to make you pay to the last cent the price of your beauty. What creature would ever for a moment help you to behave as if something that dragged in its wake a bit less of a lumbering train would, on the whole, have been better for you? The consequences of being plain

were only negative—you failed of this and that; but the consequences of being as *they* were, what were these but endless? though indeed, as far as failing went, your beauty too could let you in for enough of it. Who, at all events, would ever for a moment credit you, in the luxuriance of that beauty, with the study, on your own side, of such truths as these? Julia Bride could, at the point she had reached, positively ask herself this even while lucidly conscious of the inimitable, the triumphant and attested projection, all round her, of her exquisite image. It was only Basil French who had at last, in his doubtless dry, but all distinguished way—the way surely, as it was borne in upon her, of all the blood of all the Frenches—stepped out of the vulgar rank. It was only he who, by the trouble she discerned in him, had made her see certain things. It was only for him—and not a bit ridiculously, but just beautifully, almost sublimely—that their being "nice," her mother and she between them, had *not* seemed to profit by their being so furiously handsome.

This had, ever so grossly and ever so tiresomely, satisfied every one else; since every one had thrust upon them, had imposed upon them, as by a great cruel conspiracy, their silliest possibilities; fencing them in to these, and so not only shutting them out from others, but mounting guard at the fence, walking round and round outside it, to see they didn't escape, and admiring them, talking to them, through the rails, in mere terms of chaff, terms of chucked cakes and apples—as if they had been antelopes or zebras, or even some superior sort of performing, of dancing, bear. It had been reserved for Basil French to strike her as willing to let go, so to speak, a pound or two of this fatal treasure if he might only have got in exchange for it an ounce or so more of their so much less obvious and less published personal history. Yes, it described him to

say that, in addition to all the rest of him, and of *his* personal history, and of his family, and of theirs, in addition to their social posture, as that of a serried phalanx, and to their notoriously enormous wealth and crushing respectability, she might have been ever so much less lovely for him if she had been only—well, a little prepared to answer questions. And it wasn't as if quiet, cultivated, earnest, public-spirited, brought up in Germany, infinitely travelled, awfully like a high-caste Englishman, and all the other pleasant things, it wasn't as if he didn't love to be with her, to look at her, just as she was; for he loved it exactly as much, so far as that footing simply went, as any free and foolish youth who had ever made the last demonstration of it. It was that marriage was, for him—and for them all, the serried Frenches—a great matter, a goal to which a man of intelligence, a real shy, beautiful man of the world, didn't hop on one foot, didn't skip and jump, as if he were playing an urchins' game, but toward which he proceeded with a deep and anxious, a noble and highly just deliberation.

For it was one thing to stare at a girl till she was bored with it, it was one thing to take her to the Horse Show and the Opera, and to send her flowers by the stack, and chocolates by the ton, and "great" novels, the very latest and greatest, by the dozen; but something quite other to hold open for her, with eyes attached to eyes, the gate, moving on such stiff silver hinges, of the grand square forecourt of the palace of wedlock. The state of being "engaged" represented to him the introduction to this precinct of some young woman with whom his outside parley would have had the duration, distinctly, of his own convenience. That might be cold-blooded if one chose to think so; but nothing of another sort would equal the high ceremony and dignity and decency, above all the

grand gallantry and finality, of their then passing in. Poor Julia could have blushed red, before that view, with the memory of the way the forecourt, as she now imagined it, had been dishonored by her younger romps. She had tumbled over the wall with this, that, and the other raw playmate, and had played "tag" and leap-frog, as she might say, from corner to corner. That would be the "history" with which, in case of definite demand, she should be able to supply Mr. French: that she had already, again and again, any occasion offering, chattered and scuffled over ground provided, according to his idea, for walking the gravest of minuets. If that then had been all their *kind* of history, hers and her mother's, at least there was plenty of it: it was the superstructure raised on the other group of facts, those of the order of their having been always so perfectly pink and white, so perfectly possessed of clothes, so perfectly splendid, so perfectly idiotic. These things had been the "points" of antelope and zebra; putting Mrs. Connery for the zebra, as the more remarkably striped or spotted. Such were the *data* Basil French's inquiry would elicit: her own six engagements and her mother's three nullified marriages—nine nice distinct little horrors in all. What on earth was to be done about them?

It was notable, she was afterward to recognize, that there had been nothing of the famous business slackness in the positive pounce with which Mr. Pitman put it to her that, as soon as he had made her out "for sure," identified her there as old Julia grown-up and gallivanting with a new admirer, a smarter young fellow than ever yet, he had had the inspiration of her being exactly the good girl to help him. She certainly found him strike the hour again, with these vulgarities of tone—forms of speech that her

mother had anciently described as by themselves, once he had opened the whole battery, sufficient ground for putting him away. Full, however, of the use she should have for him, she wasn't going to mind trifles. What she really gasped at was that, so oddly, he was ahead of her at the start. "Yes, I want something of you, Julia, and I want it right now: you can do me a turn, and I'm blest if my luck—which has once or twice been pretty good, you know—hasn't sent you to me." She knew the luck he meant—that of her mother's having so enabled him to get rid of her; but it was the nearest allusion of the merely invidious kind that he would make. It had thus come to our young woman on the spot and by divination: the service he desired of her matched with remarkable closeness what she had so promptly taken into her head to name to himself—to name in her own interest, though deterred as yet from having brought it right out. She had been prevented by his speaking, the first thing, in that way, as if he had known Mr. French—which surprised her till he explained that every one in New York knew by appearance a young man of his so-quoted wealth ("What did she take them all in New York then *for?*") and of whose marked attention to her he had moreover, for himself, round at clubs and places, lately heard. This had accompanied the inevitable free question "Was she engaged to *him* now?"—which she had in fact almost welcomed as holding out to her the perch of opportunity. She was waiting to deal with it properly, but meanwhile he had gone on, and to such effect that it took them but three minutes to turn out, on either side, like a pair of pickpockets comparing, under shelter, their day's booty, the treasures of design concealed about their persons.

"I want you to tell the truth for me—as you only can. I want you to say that I was really all right—as right as

you know; and that I simply acted like an angel in a story-book, gave myself away to have it over."

"Why, my dear man," Julia cried, "you take the wind straight out of my sails! What I'm here to ask of *you* is that you'll confess to having been even a worse fiend than you were shown up for; to having made it impossible mother should *not* take proceedings." There!—she had brought it out, and with the sense of their situation turning to high excitement for her in the teeth of his droll stare, his strange grin, his characteristic "Lordy, lordy! What good will that do you?" She was prepared with her clear statement of reasons for her appeal, and feared so he might have better ones for his own that all her story came in a flash. "Well, Mr. Pitman, I want to get married this time, by way of a change; but you see we've been such fools that, when something really good at last comes up, it's too dreadfully awkward. The fools we were capable of being—well, you know better than any one: unless perhaps not quite so well as Mr. Connery. It has got to be denied," said Julia ardently—"it has got to be denied flat. But I can't get hold of Mr. Connery—Mr. Connery has gone to China. Besides, if he were here," she had ruefully to confess, "he'd be no good—on the contrary. He wouldn't deny anything—he'd only tell more. So thank heaven he's away—there's *that* amount of good! I'm not engaged yet," she went on—but he had already taken her up.

"You're not engaged to Mr. French?" It was all, clearly, a wondrous show for him, but his immediate surprise, oddly, might have been greatest for that.

"No, not to any one—for the seventh time!" She spoke as with her head held well up both over the shame and the pride. "Yes, the next time I'm engaged I want something to happen. But he's afraid; he's afraid of what

may be told him. He's dying to find out, and yet he'd die if he did! He wants to be talked to, but he has got to be talked to right. You could talk to him right, Mr. Pitman —if you only *would!* He can't get over mother—that I feel: he loathes and scorns divorces, and we've had first and last too many. So if he could hear from you that you just made her life a hell—why," Julia concluded, "it would be too lovely. If she *had* to go in for another—after having already, when I was little, divorced father—it would 'sort of' make, don't you see? one less. You'd do the high-toned thing by her: you'd say what a wretch you then were, and that she had had to save her life. In that way he mayn't mind it. Don't you see, you sweet man?" poor Julia pleaded. "Oh," she wound up as if his fancy lagged or his scruple looked out, "of course I want you to *lie* for me!"

It did indeed sufficiently stagger him. "It's a lovely idea for the moment when I was just saying to myself—as soon as I saw you—that you'd speak the truth for *me!*"

"Ah, what's the matter with 'you'?" Julia sighed with an impatience not sensibly less sharp for her having so quickly scented some lion in her path.

"Why, do you think there's no one in the world but you who has seen the cup of promised affection, of something really to be depended on, only, at the last moment, by the horrid jostle of your elbow, spilled all over you? I want to provide for my future too as it happens; and my good friend who's to help me to that—the most charming of women this time—disapproves of divorce quite as much as Mr. French. Don't you see," Mr. Pitman candidly asked, "what that by itself must have done toward attaching me to her? *She* has got to be talked to—to be told how little I could help it."

"Oh, lordy, lordy!" the girl emulously groaned. It was

such a relieving cry. "Well, *I* won't talk to her!" she declared.

"You *won't*, Julia?" he pitifully echoed. "And yet you ask of *me*—!"

His pang, she felt, was sincere; and even more than she had guessed, for the previous quarter of an hour he had been building up his hope, building it with her aid for a foundation. Yet was he going to see how their testimony, on each side, would, if offered, *have* to conflict? If he was to prove himself for her sake—or, more queerly still, for that of Basil French's high conservatism—a person whom there had been no other way of dealing with, how could she prove him, in this other and so different interest, a mere gentle sacrifice to his wife's perversity? She had, before him there, on the instant, all acutely, a sense of rising sickness—a wan glimmer of foresight as to the end of the fond dream. Everything else was against her, everything in her dreadful past—just as if she had been a person represented by some "emotional actress," some desperate erring lady "hunted down" in a play; but was that going to be the case too with her own very decency, the fierce little residuum deep within her, for which she was counting, when she came to think, on so little glory or even credit? Was this also going to turn against her and trip her up—just to show she was really, under the touch and the test, as decent as any one; and with no one but herself the wiser for it meanwhile, and no proof to show but that, as a consequence, she should be unmarried to the end? She put it to Mr. Pitman quite with resentment: "Do you mean to say you're going to be married—?"

"Oh, my dear, I too must get engaged first!"—he spoke with his inimitable grin. "But that, you see, is where you come in. I've told her about you. She wants awfully to meet you. The way it happens is too lovely—that I

find you just in this place. She's coming," said Mr. Pitman—and as in all the good faith of his eagerness now; "she's coming in about three minutes."

"Coming here?"

"Yes, Julia—right here. It's where we usually meet"; and he was wreathed again, this time as if for life, in his large slow smile. "She loves this place—she's awfully keen on art. Like *you*, Julia, if you haven't changed—I remember how you did love art." He looked at her quite tenderly, as to keep her up to it. "You must still of course—from the way you're here. Just let her *feel* that," the poor man fantastically urged. And then with his kind eyes on her and his good ugly mouth stretched as for delicate emphasis from ear to ear: "Every little helps!"

He made her wonder for him, ask herself, and with a certain intensity, questions she yet hated the trouble of; as whether he were still as moneyless as in the other time—which was certain indeed, for any fortune he ever would have made. His slackness, on that ground, stuck out of him almost as much as if he had been of rusty or "seedy" aspect—which, luckily for him, he wasn't at all: he looked, in his way, like some pleasant eccentric, ridiculous, but real gentleman, whose taste might be of the queerest, but his credit with his tailor none the less of the best. She wouldn't have been the least ashamed, had their connection lasted, of going about with him: so that what a fool, again, her mother had been—since Mr. Connery, sorry as one might be for him, was irrepressibly vulgar. Julia's quickness was, for the minute, charged with all this; but she had none the less her feeling of the right thing to say and the right way to say it. If he was after a future financially assured, even as she herself so frantically was, she wouldn't cast the stone. But if he had talked about her to strange women she couldn't be less than a little

majestic. "Who then is the person in question for you—?"

"Why, such a dear thing, Julia—Mrs. David E. Drack. Have you heard of her?" he almost fluted.

New York was vast, and she had not had that advantage. "She's a widow—?"

"Oh yes: she's not—" He caught himself up in time. "She's a real one." It was as near as he came. But it was as if he had been looking at her now so pathetically hard. "Julia, she has millions."

Hard, at any rate—whether pathetic or not—was the look she gave him back. "Well, so has—or so *will* have—Basil French. And more of them than Mrs. Drack, I guess," Julia quavered.

"Oh, I know what *they've* got!" He took it from her—with the effect of a vague stir, in his long person, of unwelcome embarrassment. But was she going to give up because he was embarrassed? He should know at least what he was costing her. It came home to her own spirit more than ever, but meanwhile he had found his footing. "I don't see how your mother matters. It isn't a question of his marrying *her*."

"No; but, constantly together as we've always been, it's a question of there being so disgustingly much to get over. If we had, for people like them, but the one ugly spot and the one weak side; if we had made, between us, but the one vulgar *kind* of mistake: well, I don't say!" She reflected with a wistfulness of note that was in itself a touching eloquence. "To have our reward in this world we've had too sweet a time. We've had it all right down here!" said Julia Bride. "I should have taken the precaution to have about a dozen fewer lovers."

"Ah, my dear, 'lovers'—!" He ever so comically attenuated.

"Well they *were!*" She quite flared up. "When you've had a ring from each (three diamonds, two pearls, and a rather bad sapphire: I've kept them all, and they tell my story!) what are you to call them?"

"Oh, rings—!" Mr. Pitman didn't call rings anything. "I've given Mrs. Drack a ring."

Julia stared. "Then aren't you her lover?"

"That, dear child," he humorously wailed, "is what I want you to find out! But I'll handle your rings all right," he more lucidly added.

"You'll 'handle' them?"

"I'll fix your lovers. I'll lie about *them*, if that's all you want."

"Oh, about 'them'—!" She turned away with a sombre drop, seeing so little in it. "That wouldn't count—from *you!*" She saw the great shining room, with its mockery of art and "style" and security, all the things she was vainly after, and its few scattered visitors who had left them, Mr. Pitman and herself, in their ample corner, so conveniently at ease. There was only a lady in one of the far doorways, of whom she took vague note and who seemed to be looking at them. "They'd have to lie for themselves!"

"Do you mean he's capable of putting it to them?"

Mr. Pitman's tone threw discredit on that possibility, but she knew perfectly well what she meant. "Not of getting at them directly, not, as mother says, of nosing round himself; but of listening—and small blame to him! —to the horrible things other people say of me."

"But what other people?"

"Why, Mrs. George Maule, to begin with—who intensely loathes us, and who talks to his sisters, so that they may talk to *him:* which they do, all the while, I'm morally sure (hating me as they also must). But it's she

who's the real reason—I mean of his holding off. She poisons the air he breathes."

"Oh well," said Mr. Pitman, with easy optimism, "if Mrs. George Maule's a cat—!"

"If she's a cat she has kittens—four little spotlessly white ones, among whom she'd give her head that Mr. French should make his pick. He could do it with his eyes shut—you can't tell them apart. But she has every name, every date, as you may say, for my dark 'record'—as of course they all call it: she'll be able to give him, if he brings himself to ask her, every fact in its order. And all the while, don't you see? there's no one to speak *for* me."

It would have touched a harder heart than her loose friend's to note the final flush of clairvoyance witnessing this assertion and under which her eyes shone as with the rush of quick tears. He stared at her, and at what this did for the deep charm of her prettiness, as in almost witless admiration. "But can't you—lovely as you are, you beautiful thing!—speak for yourself?"

"Do you mean can't I tell the lies? No, then, I can't—and I wouldn't if I could. I don't lie myself, you know—as it happens; and it could represent to him then about the only thing, the only bad one, I don't do. I *did*—'lovely as I am'!—have my regular time; I wasn't so hideous that I couldn't! Besides, do you imagine he'd come and ask me?"

"Gad, I wish he would, Julia!" said Mr. Pitman, with his kind eyes on her.

"Well then, I'd tell him!" And she held her head again high. "But he won't."

It fairly distressed her companion. "Doesn't he want, then, to know—?"

"He wants *not* to know. He wants to be told without

asking—told, I mean, that each of the stories, those that have come to him, is a fraud and a libel. *Qui s'excuse s'accuse*, don't they say?—so that do you see me breaking out to him, unprovoked, with four or five what-do-you-call-'ems, the things mother used to have to prove in court, a set of neat little 'alibis' in a row? How can I get hold of so *many* precious gentlemen, to turn them on? How can *they* want everything fished up?"

She paused for her climax, in the intensity of these considerations; which gave Mr. Pitman a chance to express his honest faith. "Why, my sweet child, they'd be just glad—!"

It determined in her loveliness almost a sudden glare. "Glad to swear they never had anything to do with such a creature? Then *I'd* be glad to swear they had lots!"

His persuasive smile, though confessing to bewilderment, insisted. "Why, my love, they've got to swear either one thing or the other."

"They've got to keep out of the way—that's *their* view of it, I guess," said Julia. "Where *are* they, please—now that they *may* be wanted? If you'd like to hunt them up for me you're very welcome." With which, for the moment, over the difficult case, they faced each other helplessly enough. And she added to it now the sharpest ache of her despair. "He knows about Murray Brush. The others"—and her pretty white-gloved hands and charming pink shoulders gave them up—"may go hang!"

"Murray Brush—?" It had opened Mr. Pitman's eyes.

"Yes—yes; I do mind *him*."

"Then what's the matter with his at least rallying—?"

"The matter is that, being ashamed of himself, as he well might, he left the country as soon as he could and has stayed away. The matter is that he's in Paris or

somewhere, and that if you expect him to come home for me—!" She had already dropped, however, as at Mr. Pitman's look.

"Why, you foolish thing, Murray Brush is in New York!" It had quite brightened him up.

"He has come back—?"

"Why, sure! I saw him—when was it? Tuesday!—on the Jersey boat." Mr. Pitman rejoiced in his news. "*He's* your man!"

Julia too had been affected by it; it had brought, in a rich wave, her hot color back. But she gave the strangest dim smile. "He *was!*"

"Then get hold of him, and—if he's a gentleman—he'll prove for you, to the hilt, that he wasn't."

It lighted in her face, the kindled train of this particular sudden suggestion, a glow, a sharpness of interest, that had deepened the next moment, while she gave a slow and sad head-shake, to a greater strangeness yet. "He isn't a gentleman."

"Ah, lordy, lordy!" Mr. Pitman again sighed. He struggled out of it but only into the vague. "Oh, then, if he's a pig—!"

"You see there are only a few gentlemen—not enough to go round—and that makes them count so!" It had thrust the girl herself, for that matter, into depths; but whether most of memory or of roused purpose he had no time to judge—aware as he suddenly was of a shadow (since he mightn't perhaps too quickly call it a light) across the heaving surface of their question. It fell upon Julia's face, fell with the sound of the voice he so well knew, but which could only be odd to her for all it immediately assumed.

"There are indeed very few—and one mustn't try *them* too much!" Mrs. Drack, who had supervened while they

talked, stood, in monstrous magnitude—at least to Julia's reimpressed eyes—between them: she was the lady our young woman had descried across the room, and she had drawn near while the interest of their issue so held them. We have seen the act of observation and that of reflection alike swift in Julia—once her subject was within range—and she had now, with all her perceptions at the acutest, taken in, by a single stare, the strange presence to a happy connection with which Mr. Pitman aspired and which had thus sailed, with placid majesty, into their troubled waters. She was clearly not shy, Mrs. David E. Drack, yet neither was she ominously bold; she was bland and "good," Julia made sure at a glance, and of a large complacency, as the good and the bland are apt to be—a large complacency, a large sentimentality, a large innocent, elephantine archness: she fairly rioted in that dimension of size. Habited in an extraordinary quantity of stiff and lustrous black brocade, with enhancements, of every description, that twinkled and tinkled, that rustled and rumbled with her least movement, she presented a huge, hideous, pleasant face, a featureless desert in a remote quarter of which the disproportionately small eyes might have figured a pair of rash adventurers all but buried in the sand. They reduced themselves when she smiled to barely discernible points—a couple of mere tiny emergent heads—though the foreground of the scene, as if to make up for it, gaped with a vast benevolence. In a word Julia saw—and as if she had needed nothing more; saw Mr. Pitman's opportunity, saw her own, saw the exact nature both of Mrs. Drack's circumspection and of Mrs. Drack's sensibility, saw even, glittering there in letters of gold and as a part of the whole metallic coruscation, the large figure of her income, largest of all her attributes, and (though perhaps a little more as a luminous blur beside all this) the mingled

ecstasy and agony of Mr. Pitman's hope and Mr. Pitman's fear.

He was introducing them, with his pathetic belief in the virtue for every occasion, in the solvent for every trouble, of an extravagant, genial, professional humor; he was naming her to Mrs. Drack as the charming young friend he had told her so much about and who had been as an angel to him in a weary time; he was saying that the loveliest chance in the world, this accident of a meeting in those promiscuous halls, had placed within his reach the pleasure of bringing them together. It didn't indeed matter, Julia felt, what he was saying: he conveyed everything, as far as she was concerned, by a moral pressure as unmistakable as if, for a symbol of it, he had thrown himself on her neck. Above all, meanwhile, this high consciousness prevailed—that the good lady herself, however huge she loomed, had entered, by the end of a minute, into a condition as of suspended weight and arrested mass, stilled to artless awe by the fact of her vision. Julia had practised almost to lassitude the art of tracing in the people who looked at her the impression promptly sequent; but it was a striking point that if, in irritation, in depression, she felt that the lightest eyes of men, stupid at their clearest, had given her pretty well all she should ever care for, she could still gather a freshness from the tribute of her own sex, still care to see her reflection in the faces of women. Never, probably, never would that sweet be tasteless—with such a straight grim spoon was it mostly administered, and so flavored and strengthened by the competence of their eyes. Women knew so much best *how* a woman surpassed—how and where and why, with no touch or torment of it lost on them; so that as it produced mainly and primarily the instinct of aversion, the sense of extracting the recognition, of gouging out the

homage, was on the whole the highest crown one's felicity could wear. Once in a way, however, the grimness beautifully dropped, the jealousy failed: the admiration was all there and the poor plain sister handsomely paid it. It had never been so paid, she was presently certain, as by this great generous object of Mr. Pitman's flame, who without optical aid, it well might have seemed, nevertheless entirely grasped her—might in fact, all benevolently, have been groping her over as by some huge mild proboscis. She gave Mrs. Drack pleasure in short; and who could say of what other pleasures the poor lady hadn't been cheated?

It was somehow a muddled world in which one of her conceivable joys, at this time of day, would be to marry Mr. Pitman—to say nothing of a state of things in which this gentleman's own fancy could invest such a union with rapture. That, however, was their own mystery, and Julia, with each instant, was more and more clear about hers: so remarkably primed in fact, at the end of three minutes, that though her friend, and though *his* friend, were both saying things, many things and perhaps quite wonderful things, she had no free attention for them and was only rising and soaring. She was rising to her value, she was soaring *with* it—the value Mr. Pitman almost convulsively imputed to her, the value that consisted for her of being so unmistakably the most dazzling image Mrs. Drack had ever beheld. These were the uses, for Julia, in fine, of adversity; the range of Mrs. Drack's experience might have been as small as the measure of her presence was large: Julia was at any rate herself in face of the occasion of her life, and, after all her late repudiations and reactions, had perhaps never yet known the quality of this moment's success. She hadn't an idea of what, on either side, had been uttered—beyond Mr. Pit-

man's allusion to her having befriended him of old: she simply held his companion with her radiance and knew she might be, for her effect, as irrelevant as she chose. It was relevant to do what he wanted—it was relevant to dish herself. She did it now with a kind of passion, to say nothing of her knowing, with it, that every word of it added to her beauty. She gave him away in short, up to the hilt, for any use of her own, and should have nothing to clutch at now but the possibility of Murray Brush.

"He says I was good to him, Mrs. Drack; and I'm sure I hope I was, since I should be ashamed to be anything else. If I could be good to him now I should be glad—that's just what, a while ago, I rushed up to him here, after so long, to give myself the pleasure of saying. I saw him years ago very particularly, very miserably tried—and I saw the way he took it. I did see it, you dear man," she sublimely went on—"I saw it for all you may protest, for all you may hate me to talk about you! I saw you behave like a gentleman—since Mrs. Drack agrees with me, so charmingly, that there are not many to be met. I don't know whether you care, Mrs. Drack"—she abounded, she revelled in the name—"but I've always remembered it of him: that under the most extraordinary provocation he was decent and patient and brave. No appearance of anything different matters, for I speak of what I *know*. Of course I'm nothing and nobody; I'm only a poor frivolous girl, but I was very close to him at the time. That's all my little story—if it *should* interest you at all." She measured every beat of her wing, she knew how high she was going and paused only when it was quite vertiginous. Here she hung a moment as in the glare of the upper blue; which was but the glare—what else could it be?—of the vast and magnificent attention of both her auditors, hushed, on their side, in the splendor

she emitted. She had at last to steady herself, and she scarce knew afterward at what rate or in what way she had still inimitably come down—her own eyes fixed all the while on the very figure of her achievement. She had sacrificed her mother on the altar—proclaimed her as false and cruel; and if that didn't "fix" Mr. Pitman, as he would have said—well, it was all she could do. But the cost of her action already somehow came back to her with increase; the dear gaunt man fairly wavered, to her sight, in the glory of it, as if signalling at her, with wild gleeful arms, from some mount of safety, while the massive lady just spread and spread like a rich fluid a bit helplessly spilt. It was really the outflow of the poor woman's honest response, into which she seemed to melt, and Julia scarce distinguished the two apart even for her taking gracious leave of each. "Good-bye, Mrs. Drack; I'm awfully happy to have met you"—like as not it was for this she had grasped Mr. Pitman's hand. And then to him or to her, it didn't matter which, "Good-bye, dear good Mr. Pitman—hasn't it been nice after so long?"

II

Julia floated even to her own sense swan-like away—she left in her wake their fairly stupefied submission: it was as if she had, by an exquisite authority, now *placed* them, each for each, and they would have nothing to do but be happy together. Never had she so exulted as on this ridiculous occasion in the noted items of her beauty. *Le compte y était,* as they used to say in Paris—every one of them, for her immediate employment, was there; and there was something in it after all. It didn't necessarily, this sum of thumping little figures, imply charm—especially for "refined" people: nobody knew better than

Julia that inexpressible charm and quotable "charms" (quotable like prices, rates, shares, or whatever, the things they dealt in down-town) are two distinct categories; the safest thing for the latter being, on the whole, that it might include the former, and the great strength of the former being that it might perfectly dispense with the latter. Mrs. Drack was not refined, not the least little bit; but what would be the case with Murray Brush now —after his three years of Europe? He had done so what he liked with her—which had seemed so then just the meaning, hadn't it? of their being "engaged"—that he had made her not see, while the absurdity lasted (the absurdity of their pretending to believe they could marry without a cent), how little he was of metal without alloy: this had come up for her, remarkably, but afterward—come up for her as she looked back. Then she had drawn her conclusion, which was one of the many that Basil French had made her draw. It was a queer service Basil was going to have rendered her, this having made everything she had ever done impossible, if he wasn't going to give her a new chance. If he was it was doubtless right enough. On the other hand, Murray might have improved, if such a quantity of alloy, as she called it, *were*, in any man, reducible, and if Paris were the place all happily to reduce it. She had her doubts—anxious and aching on the spot, and had expressed them to Mr. Pitman: certainly, of old, he had been more open to the quotable than to the inexpressible, to charms than to charm. If she could try the quotable, however, and with such a grand result, on Mrs. Drack, she couldn't now on Murray—in respect to whom everything had changed. So that if he hadn't a sense for the subtler appeal, the appeal appreciable by people *not* vulgar, on which alone she could depend, what on earth would become of her? She could but

yearningly hope, at any rate, as she made up her mind to write to him immediately at his club. It was a question of the right sensibility in him. Perhaps he would have acquired it in Europe.

Two days later indeed—for he had promptly and charmingly replied, keeping with alacrity the appointment she had judged best to propose for a morning hour in a sequestered alley of the Park—two days later she was to be struck well-nigh to alarm by everything he had acquired: so much it seemed to make that it threatened somehow a complication, and her plan, so far as she had arrived at one, dwelt in the desire above all to simplify. She wanted no grain more of extravagance or excess of anything—risking as she had done, none the less, a recall of ancient license in proposing to Murray such a place of meeting. She had her reasons—she wished intensely to discriminate: Basil French had several times waited on her at her mother's habitation, their horrible flat which was so much too far up and too near the East Side; he had dined there and lunched there and gone with her thence to other places, notably to see pictures, and had in particular adjourned with her twice to the Metropolitan Museum, in which he took a great interest, in which she professed a delight, and their second visit to which had wound up in her encounter with Mr. Pitman, after her companion had yielded, at her urgent instance, to an exceptional need of keeping a business engagement. She mightn't, in delicacy, in decency, entertain Murray Brush where she had entertained Mr. French—she was given over now to these exquisite perceptions and proprieties and bent on devoutly observing them; and Mr. French, by good-luck, had never been with her in the Park: partly because he had never pressed it, and partly because she would have held off if he had, so haunted were those devious

paths and favoring shades by the general echo of her untrammelled past. If he had never suggested their taking a turn there this was because, quite divinably, he held it would commit him further than he had yet gone; and if she on her side had practised a like reserve it was because the place reeked for her, as she inwardly said, with old associations. It reeked with nothing so much perhaps as with the memories evoked by the young man who now awaited her in the nook she had been so competent to indicate; but in what corner of the town, should she look for them, wouldn't those footsteps creak back into muffled life, and to what expedient would she be reduced should she attempt to avoid all such tracks? The Museum was full of tracks, tracks by the hundred—the way really she had knocked about!—but she had to see people somewhere, and she couldn't pretend to dodge every ghost.

All she could do was not to make confusion, make mixtures, of the living; though she asked herself enough what mixture she mightn't find herself to have prepared if Mr. French should, not so very impossibly, for a restless, roaming man—*her* effect on him!—happen to pass while she sat there with the mustachioed personage round whose name Mrs. Maule would probably have caused detrimental anecdote most thickly to cluster. There existed, she was sure, a mass of luxuriant legend about the "lengths" her engagement with Murray Brush had gone; she could herself fairly feel them in the air, these streamers of evil, black flags flown as in warning, the vast redundancy of so cheap and so dingy social bunting, in fine, that flapped over the stations she had successively moved away from and which were empty now, for such an ado, even to grotesqueness. The vivacity of that conviction was what had at present determined her, while it was the way he listened after she had quickly broken ground, while it was

the special character of the interested look in his handsome face, handsomer than ever yet, that represented for her the civilization he had somehow taken on. Just so it was the quantity of that gain, in its turn, that had at the end of ten minutes begun to affect her as holding up a light to the wide reach of her step. "There was never anything the least serious between us, not a sign or a scrap, do you mind? of anything beyond the merest pleasant friendly acquaintance; and if you're not ready to go to the stake on it for me you may as well know in time what it is you'll probably cost me."

She had immediately plunged, measuring her effect and having thought it well over; and what corresponded to her question of his having become a better person to appeal to was the appearance of interest she had so easily created in him. She felt on the spot the difference that made—it was indeed his form of being more civilized: it was the sense in which Europe in general and Paris in particular had made him develop. By every calculation—and her calculations, based on the intimacy of her knowledge, had been many and deep—he would help her the better the more intelligent he should have become; yet she was to recognize later on that the first chill of foreseen disaster had been caught by her as, at a given moment, this greater refinement of his attention seemed to exhale it. It was just what she had wanted—"if I can only get him interested—!" so that, this proving quite vividly possible, why did the light it lifted strike her as lurid? Was it partly by reason of his inordinate romantic good looks, those of a gallant, genial conqueror, but which, involving so glossy a brownness of eye, so manly a crispness of curl, so red-lipped a radiance of smile, so natural a bravery of port, prescribed to any response he might facially, might expressively, make a sort of florid, disproportionate ampli-

tude? The explanation, in any case, didn't matter; he was going to mean well—that she could feel, and also that he had meant better in the past, presumably, than he had managed to convince her of his doing at the time: the oddity she hadn't now reckoned with was this fact that from the moment he did advertise an interest it should show almost as what she would have called weird. It made a change in him that didn't go with the rest—as if he had broken his nose or put on spectacles, lost his handsome hair or sacrificed his splendid mustache: her conception, her necessity, as she saw, had been that something should be added to him for her use, but nothing for his own alteration.

He had affirmed himself, and his character, and his temper, and his health, and his appetite, and his ignorance, and his obstinacy, and his whole charming, coarse, heartless personality, during their engagement, by twenty forms of natural emphasis, but never by emphasis of interest. How in fact could you feel interest unless you should know, within you, some dim stir of imagination? There was nothing in the world of which Murray Brush was less capable than of such a dim stir, because you only began to imagine when you felt some approach to a need to understand. *He* had never felt it; for hadn't he been born, to his personal vision, with that perfect intuition of everything which reduces all the suggested preliminaries of judgment to the impertinence—when it's a question of your entering your house—of a dumpage of bricks at your door? He had had, in short, neither to imagine nor to perceive, because he had, from the first pulse of his intelligence, simply and supremely known: so that, at this hour, face to face with him, it came over her that she had, in their old relation, dispensed with any such convenience of comprehension on his part even to a degree she had not

measured at the time. What therefore must he not have seemed to her as a form of life, a form of avidity and activity, blatantly successful in its own conceit, that he could have dazzled her so against the interest of her very faculties and functions? Strangely and richly historic all that backward mystery, and only leaving for her mind the wonder of such a mixture of possession and detachment as they would clearly to-day both know. For each to be so little at last to the other when, during months together, the idea of all abundance, all quantity, had been, for each, drawn from the other and addressed to the other—what was it monstrously like but some fantastic act of getting rid of a person by going to lock yourself up in the *sanctum sanctorum* of that person's house, amid every evidence of that person's habits and nature? What was going to happen, at any rate, was that Murray would show himself as beautifully and consciously understanding—and it would be prodigious that Europe should have inoculated him with that delicacy. Yes, he wouldn't claim to know now till she had told him—an aid to performance he had surely never before waited for, or been indebted to, from any one; and then, so knowing, he would charmingly endeavor to "meet," to oblige and to gratify. He would find it, her case, ever so worthy of his benevolence, and would be literally inspired to reflect that he must hear about it first.

She let him hear then everything, in spite of feeling herself slip, while she did so, to some doom as yet incalculable; she went on very much as she had done for Mr. Pitman and Mrs. Drack, with the rage of desperation and, as she was afterward to call it to herself, the fascination of the abyss. She didn't know, couldn't have said at the time, *why* his projected benevolence should have had most so the virtue to scare her: he would patronize her, as an effect of her vividness, if not of her charm, and would do

this with all high intention, finding her case, or rather *their* case, their funny old case, taking on of a sudden such refreshing and edifying life, to the last degree curious and even important; but there were gaps of connection between this and the intensity of the perception here overtaking her that she shouldn't be able to move in *any* direction without dishing herself. That she couldn't afford it where she had got to—couldn't afford the deplorable vulgarity of having been so many times informally affianced and contracted (putting it only at that, at its being by the new lights and fashions so unpardonably vulgar): he took this from her without turning, as she might have said, a hair; except just to indicate, with his new superiority, that he felt the distinguished appeal and notably the pathos of it. He still took it from her that she hoped nothing, as it were, from any other *alibi*—the people to drag into court being too many and too scattered; but that, as it was with him, Murray Brush, she had been *most* vulgar, most everything she had better not have been, so she depended on him for the innocence it was actually vital she should establish. He flushed or frowned or winced no more at that than he did when she once more fairly emptied her satchel and, quite as if they had been Nancy and the Artful Dodger, or some nefarious pair of that sort, talking things over in the manner of *Oliver Twist*, revealed to him the fondness of her view that, could she but have produced a cleaner slate, she might by this time have pulled it off with Mr. French. Yes, he let her in that way sacrifice her honorable connection with him—all the more honorable for being so completely at an end—to the crudity of her plan for not missing another connection, so much more brilliant than what he offered, and for bringing another man, with whom she so invidiously and unflatteringly compared him, into her greedy life.

There was only a moment during which, by a particular lustrous look she had never had from him before, he just made her wonder which turn he was going to take; she felt, however, as safe as was consistent with her sense of having probably but added to her danger, when he brought out, the next instant: "Don't you seem to take the ground that we were guilty—that *you* were ever guilty—of something we shouldn't have been? What did we ever do that was secret, or underhand, or any way not to be acknowledged? What did we do but exchange our young vows with the best faith in the world—publicly, rejoicingly, with the full assent of every one connected with us? I mean of course," he said with his grave kind smile, "till we broke off so completely because we found that—practically, financially, on the hard worldly basis—we couldn't work it. What harm, in the sight of God or man, Julia," he asked in his fine rich way, "did we ever do?"

She gave him back his look, turning pale. "Am I talking of *that?* Am I talking of what *we* know? I'm talking of what others feel—of what they *have* to feel; of what it's just enough for them to know not to be able to get over it, once they do really know it. How do they know what *didn't* pass between us, with all the opportunities we had? That's none of their business—if we were idiots enough, on the top of everything! What you may or mayn't have done doesn't count, for *you;* but there are people for whom it's loathsome that a girl should have gone on like that from one person to another and still pretend to be—well, all that a nice girl is supposed to be. It's as if we had but just waked up, mother and I, to such a remarkable prejudice; and now we have it—when we could do so well without it!—staring us in the face. That mother should have insanely *let* me, should so vulgarly have taken it for my natural, my social career—*that's* the

disgusting, humiliating thing: with the lovely account it gives of both of us! But mother's view of a delicacy in things!" she went on with scathing grimness; "mother's measure of anything, with her grand 'gained cases' (there'll be another yet, she finds them so easy!) of which she's so publicly proud! You see I've no margin," said Julia; letting him take it from her flushed face as much as he would that her mother hadn't left her an inch. It was that he should make use of the spade with her for the restoration of a bit of a margin just wide enough to perch on till the tide of peril should have ebbed a little, it was that he should give her *that* lift—!

Well, it was all there from him after these last words; it was before her that he really took hold. "Oh, my dear child, I can see! Of course there are people—ideas change in our society so fast!—who are not in sympathy with the old American freedom and who read, I dare say, all sorts of uncanny things into it. Naturally you must take them as they are—from the moment," said Murray Brush, who had lighted, by her leave, a cigarette, "your life-path does, for weal or for woe, cross with theirs." He had every now and then such an elegant phrase. "Awfully interesting, certainly, your case. It's enough for me that it *is* yours—I make it my own. I put myself absolutely in your place; you'll understand from me, without professions, won't you? that I do. Command me in every way! What I do like is the sympathy with which you've inspired *him*. I don't, I'm sorry to say, happen to know him personally,"—he smoked away, looking off; "but of course one knows all about him generally, and I'm sure he's right for you, I'm sure it would be charming, if you yourself think so. Therefore trust me and even—what shall I say?—leave it to me a little, won't you?" He had been watching, as in his fumes, the fine growth of his pos-

sibilities; and with this he turned on her the large warmth of his charity. It was like a subscription of a half-a-million. "I'll take care of you."

She found herself for a moment looking up at him from as far below as the point from which the school-child, with round eyes raised to the wall, gazes at the parti-colored map of the world. Yes, it was a warmth, it was a special benignity, that had never yet dropped on her from any one; and she wouldn't for the first few moments have known how to describe it or even quite what to do with it. Then, as it still rested, his fine improved expression aiding, the sense of what had happened came over her with a rush. She was being, yes, patronized; and that was really as new to her—the freeborn American girl who might, if she had wished, have got engaged and disengaged not six times but sixty—as it would have been to be crowned or crucified. The Frenches themselves didn't do it—the Frenches themselves didn't dare it. It was as strange as one would: she recognized it when it came, but anything might have come rather—and it was coming by (of all people in the world) Murray Brush! It overwhelmed her; still she could speak, with however faint a quaver and however sick a smile. "You'll lie for me like a gentleman?"

"As far as that goes till I'm black in the face!" And then while he glowed at her and she wondered if he would pointedly look his lies that way, and if, in fine, his florid, gallant, knowing, almost winking intelligence, *common* as she had never seen the common vivified, would represent his notion of "blackness": "See here, Julia; I'll do more."

"'More'—?"

"Everything. I'll take it right in hand. I'll fling over you—"

"Fling over me—?" she continued to echo as he fascinatingly fixed her.

"Well, the biggest *kind* of rose-colored mantle!" And this time, oh, he did wink: it *would* be the way he was going to wink (and in the grandest good faith in the world) when indignantly denying, under inquisition, that there had been "a sign or a scrap" between them. But there was more to come; he decided she should have it all. "Julia, you've got to know now." He hung fire but an instant more. "Julia, I'm going to be married." His "Julias" were somehow death to her; she could feel that even *through* all the rest. "Julia, I announce my engagement."

"Oh, lordy, lordy!" she wailed: it might have been addressed to Mr. Pitman.

The force of it had brought her to her feet, but he sat there smiling up as at the natural tribute of her interest. "I tell you before any one else; it's not to be 'out' for a day or two yet. But we want you to know; *she* said that as soon as I mentioned to her that I had heard from you. I mention to her everything, you see!"—and he almost simpered while, still in his seat, he held the end of his cigarette, all delicately and as for a form of gentle emphasis, with the tips of his fine fingers. "You've not met her, Mary Lindeck, I think: she tells me she hasn't the pleasure of knowing you, but she desires it so much—particularly longs for it. She'll take an interest too," he went on; "you must let me immediately bring her to you. She has heard so much about you and she really wants to see you."

"Oh mercy *me!*" poor Julia gasped again—so strangely did history repeat itself and so did this appear the echo, on Murray Brush's lips, and quite to drollery, of that sympathetic curiosity of Mrs. Drack's which Mr. Pitman had, as they said, voiced. Well, there had played before her the vision of a ledge of safety in face of a rising tide; but this deepened quickly to a sense more forlorn, the cold swish

of waters already up to her waist and that would soon be up to her chin. It came really but from the air of her friend, from the perfect benevolence and high unconsciousness with which he kept his posture—as if to show he could patronize her from below upward quite as well as from above down. And as she took it all in, as it spread to a flood, with the great lumps and masses of truth it was floating, she knew inevitable submission, not to say submersion, as she had never known it in her life; going down and down before it, not even putting out her hands to resist or cling by the way, only reading into the young man's very face an immense fatality and. for all his bright nobleness his absence of rancor or of protesting pride, the great gray blankness of her doom. It was as if the earnest Miss Lindeck, tall and mild, high and lean, with eye-glasses and a big nose, but "marked" in a noticeable way, elegant and distinguished and refined, as you could see from a mile off, and as graceful, for common despair of imitation, as the curves of the "copy" set of old by one's writing-master—it was as if this stately well-wisher, whom indeed she had never exchanged a word with, but whom she had recognized and placed and winced at as soon as he spoke of her, figured there beside him now as also in portentous charge of her case.

He had ushered her into it in that way as if his mere right word sufficed; and Julia could see them throne together, beautifully at one in all the interests they now shared, and regard her as an object of almost tender solicitude. It was positively as if they had become engaged for her good—in such a happy light as it shed. That was the way people you had known, known a bit intimately, looked at you as soon as they took on the high matrimonial propriety that sponged over the more or less wild past to which you belonged, and of which, all of a sudden, they

were aware only through some suggestion it made them for reminding you definitely that you still had a place. On her having had a day or two before to meet Mrs. Drack and to rise to her expectation she had seen and felt herself act, had above all admired herself, and had at any rate known what she said, even though losing, at her altitude, any distinctness in the others. She could have repeated later on the detail of her performance—if she hadn't preferred to keep it with her as a mere locked-up, a mere unhandled treasure. At present, however, as everything was for her at first deadened and vague, true to the general effect of sounds and motions in water, she couldn't have said afterward what words she spoke, what face she showed, what impression she made—at least till she had pulled herself round to precautions. She only knew she had turned away, and that this movement must have sooner or later determined his rising to join her, his deciding to accept it, gracefully and condoningly—condoningly in respect to her natural emotion, her inevitable little pang—for an intimation that they would be better on their feet.

They trod then afresh their ancient paths; and though it pressed upon her hatefully that he must have taken her abruptness for a smothered shock, the flare-up of her old feeling at the breath of his news, she had still to see herself condemned to allow him this, condemned really to encourage him in the mistake of believing her suspicious of feminine spite and doubtful of Miss Lindeck's zeal. She was so far from doubtful that she was but too appalled at it and at the officious mass in which it loomed, and this instinct of dread, before their walk was over, before she had guided him round to one of the smaller gates, there to slip off again by herself, was positively to find on the bosom of her flood a plank by the aid of which she kept in a manner and for the time afloat. She took ten min-

utes to pant, to blow gently, to paddle disguisedly, to accommodate herself, in a word, to the elements she had let loose; but as a reward of her effort at least she then saw how her determined vision accounted for everything. Beside her friend on the bench she had truly felt all his cables cut, truly swallowed down the fact that if he still perceived she was pretty—and *how* pretty!—it had ceased appreciably to matter to him. It had lighted the folly of her preliminary fear, the fear of his even yet to some effect of confusion or other inconvenience for her, proving more alive to the quotable in her, as she had called it, than to the inexpressible. She had reckoned with the awkwardness of that possible failure of his measure of her charm, by which his renewed apprehension of her grosser ornaments, those with which he had most affinity, might too much profit; but she need have concerned herself as little for his sensibility on one head as on the other. She had ceased personally, ceased materially—in respect, as who should say, to any optical or tactile advantage—to exist for him, and the whole office of his manner had been the more piously and gallantly to dress the dead presence with flowers. This was all to his credit and his honor, but what it clearly certified was that their case was at last not even one of spirit reaching out to spirit. *He* had plenty of spirit—had all the spirit required for his having engaged himself to Miss Lindeck, into which result, once she had got her head well up again, she read, as they proceeded, one sharp meaning after another. It was therefore toward the subtler essence of that mature young woman alone that he was occupied in stretching; what was definite to him about Julia Bride being merely, being entirely—which was indeed thereby quite enough—that she *might* end by scaling her worldly height. They would push, they would shove, they would "boost," they would arch both their

straight backs as pedestals for her tiptoe; and at the same time, by some sweet prodigy of mechanics, she would pull them up and up with her.

Wondrous things hovered before her in the course of this walk; her consciousness had become, by an extraordinary turn, a music-box in which, its lid well down, the most remarkable tunes were sounding. It played for her ear alone, and the lid, as she might have figured, was her firm plan of holding out till she got home, of not betraying —to her companion at least—the extent to which she was demoralized. To see him think her demoralized by mistrust of the sincerity of the service to be meddlesomely rendered her by his future wife—she would have hurled herself publicly into the lake there at their side, would have splashed, in her beautiful clothes, among the frightened swans, rather than invite him to that ineptitude. Oh, her sincerity, Mary Lindeck's—she would be drenched with her sincerity, and she would be drenched, yes, with *his;* so that, from inward convulsion to convulsion, she had, before they reached their gate, pulled up in the path. There was something her head had been full of these three or four minutes, the intensest little tune of the music-box, and it made its way to her lips now; belonging—for all the good it could do her!—to the two or three sorts of solicitude she might properly express.

"I hope *she* has a fortune, if you don't mind my speaking of it: I mean some of the money we didn't in *our* time have—and that we missed, after all, in our poor way and for what we then wanted of it, so quite dreadfully."

She had been able to wreathe it in a grace quite equal to any he himself had employed; and it was to be said for him also that he kept up, on this, the standard. "Oh, she's not, thank goodness, at all badly off, poor dear. We shall do very well. How sweet of you to have thought of it!

May I tell her that too?" he splendidly glared. Yes, he glared—how couldn't he, with what his mind was really full of? But, all the same, he came just here, by her vision, nearer than at any other point to being a gentleman. He came quite within an ace of it—with his taking from her thus the prescription of humility of service, his consenting to act in the interest of her avidity, his letting her mount that way, on his bowed shoulders, to the success in which he could suppose she still believed. He couldn't know, he would never know, that she had then and there ceased to believe in it—that she saw as clear as the sun in the sky the exact manner in which, between them, before they had done, the Murray Brushes, all zeal and sincerity, all interest in her interesting case, would dish, would ruin, would utterly destroy her. He wouldn't have needed to go on, for the force and truth of this; but he did go on—he was as crashingly consistent as a motor-car without a brake. He was visibly in love with the idea of what they might do for her and of the rare "social" opportunity that they would, by the same stroke, embrace. How he had been offhand with it, how he had made it parenthetic, that he didn't happen "personally" to know Basil French—as if it would have been at all likely he *should* know him, even *im*personally, and as if he could conceal from her the fact that, since she had made him her overture, this gentleman's name supremely baited her hook! Oh, they would help Julia Bride if they could—they would do their remarkable best; but they would at any rate have made his acquaintance over it, and she might indeed leave the rest to their thoroughness. He would already have known, he would already have heard; her appeal, she was more and more sure, wouldn't have come to him as a revelation. He had already talked it over with *her*, with Miss Lindeck, to whom the Frenches, in

their fortress, had never been accessible, and his whole attitude bristled, to Julia's eyes, with the betrayal of her hand, her voice, her pressure, her calculation. His tone, in fact, as he talked, fairly thrust these things into her face. "But you must see her for yourself. You'll judge her. You'll love her. My dear child"—he brought it all out, and if he spoke of children he might, in his candor, have been himself infantine—"my dear child, she's the person to do it for you. Make it over to her; but," he laughed, "of course see her first! Couldn't you," he wound up—for they were now near their gate, where she was to leave him—"couldn't you just simply make us meet him, at tea say, informally; just *us* alone, as pleasant old friends of whom you'd have so naturally and frankly spoken to him: and then see what we'd *make* of that?"

It was all in his expression; he couldn't keep it out of that, and his shining good looks couldn't: ah, he was so fatally much too handsome for her! So the gap showed just there, in his admirable mask and his admirable eagerness; the yawning little chasm showed where the gentleman fell short. But she took this in, she took everything in, she felt herself do it, she heard herself say, while they paused before separation, that she quite saw the point of the meeting, as he suggested, at her tea. She would propose it to Mr. French and would let them know; and he must assuredly bring Miss Lindeck, bring her "right away," bring her soon, bring *them*, his fiancée and her, together somehow, and as quickly as possible—so that they *should* be old friends before the tea. She would propose it to Mr. French, propose it to Mr. French: that hummed in her ears as she went—after she had really got away; hummed as if she were repeating it over, giving it out to the passers, to the pavement, to the sky, and all as in wild discord with the intense little concert of her music-

box. The extraordinary thing too was that she quite believed she should do it, and fully meant to; desperately, fantastically passive—since she almost reeled with it as she proceeded—she was capable of proposing anything to any one: capable too of thinking it likely Mr. French would come, for he had never on her previous proposals declined anything. Yes, she would keep it up to the end, this pretence of owing them salvation, and might even live to take comfort in having done for them what they wanted. What they wanted *couldn't* but be to get at the Frenches, and what Miss Lindeck above all wanted, baffled of it otherwise, with so many others of the baffled, was to get at Mr. French—for all Mr. French would want of either of them!—still more than Murray did. It was not till after she had got home, got straight into her own room and flung herself on her face, that she yielded to the full taste of the bitterness of missing a connection, missing the man himself, with power to create such a social appetite, such a grab at what might be gained by them. He could make people, even people like these two and whom there were still other people to envy, he could make them push and snatch and scramble like that—and then remain as incapable of taking her from the hands of such patrons as of receiving her straight, say, from those of Mrs. Drack. It was a high note, too, of Julia's wonderful composition that, even in the long, lonely moan of her conviction of her now certain ruin, all this grim lucidity, the perfect clearance of passion, but made her supremely proud of him.

XIV

A LODGING FOR THE NIGHT

BY

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894)

A Lodging for the Night

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IT was late in November 1456. The snow fell over Paris with rigorous, relentless persistence; sometimes the wind made a sally and scattered it in flying vortices; sometimes there was a lull, and flake after flake descended out of the black night air, silent, circuitous, interminable. To poor people, looking up under moist eyebrows, it seemed a wonder where it all came from. Master Francis Villon had propounded an alternative that afternoon, at a tavern window: was it only Pagan Jupiter plucking geese upon Olympus, or were the holy angels moulting? He was only a poor Master of Arts, he went on; and as the question somewhat touched upon divinity, he durst not venture to conclude. A silly old priest from Montargis, who was among the company, treated the young rascal to a bottle of wine in honor of the jest and the grimaces with which it was accompanied, and swore on his own white beard that he had been just such another irreverent dog when he was Villon's age.

The air was raw and pointed, but not far below freezing; and the flakes were large, damp, and adhesive. The whole city was sheeted up. An army might have marched from end to end and not a footfall given the alarm. If there were any belated birds in heaven, they saw the island like a large white patch, and the bridges like slim white spars, on the black ground of the river. High up overhead the

snow settled among the tracery of the cathedral towers. Many a niche was drifted full; many a statue wore a long white bonnet on its grotesque or sainted head. The gargoyles had been transformed into great false noses, drooping toward the point. The crockets were like upright pillows swollen on one side. In the intervals of the wind there was a dull sound of dripping about the precincts of the church.

The cemetery of St. John had taken its own share of the snow. All the graves were decently covered; tall, white housetops stood around in grave array; worthy burghers were long ago in bed, benightcapped like their domiciles; there was no light in all the neighborhood but a little peep from a lamp that hung swinging in the church choir, and tossed the shadows to and fro in time to its oscillations. The clock was hard on ten when the patrol went by with halberds and a lantern, beating their hands; and they saw nothing suspicious about the cemetery of St. John.

Yet there was a small house, backed up against the cemetery wall, which was still awake, and awake to evil purpose, in that snoring district. There was not much to betray it from without; only a stream of warm vapor from the chimney-top, a patch where the snow melted on the roof, and a few half-obliterated footprints at the door. But within, behind the shuttered windows, Master Francis Villon, the poet, and some of the thievish crew with whom he consorted, were keeping the night alive and passing round the bottle.

A great pile of living embers diffused a strong and ruddy glow from the arched chimney. Before this straddled Dom Nicolas, the Picardy monk, with his skirts picked up and his fat legs bared to the comfortable warmth. His dilated shadow cut the room in half; and the firelight only es-

caped on either side of his broad person, and in a little pool between his outspread feet. His face had the beery, bruised appearance of the continual drinker's; it was covered with a network of congested veins, purple in ordinary circumstances, but now pale violet, for even with his back to the fire the cold pinched him on the other side. His cowl had half fallen back, and made a strange excrescence on either side of his bull neck. So he straddled, grumbling, and cut the room in half with the shadow of his portly frame.

On the right, Villon and Guy Tabary were huddled together over a scrap of parchment; Villon making a ballade which he was to call the *Ballade of Roast Fish*, and Tabary spluttering admiration at his shoulder. The poet was a rag of a man, dark, little, and lean, with hollow cheeks and thin black locks. He carried his four-and-twenty years with feverish animation. Greed had made folds about his eyes, evil smiles had puckered his mouth. The wolf and pig struggled together in his face. It was an eloquent, sharp, ugly, earthly countenance. His hands were small and prehensile, with fingers knotted like a cord; and they were continually flickering in front of him in violent and expressive pantomime. As for Tabary, a broad, complacent, admiring imbecility breathed from his squash nose and slobbering lips: he had become a thief, just as he might have become the most decent of burgesses, by the imperious chance that rules the lives of human geese and human donkeys.

At the monk's other hand, Montigny and Thevenin Pensete played a game of chance. About the first there clung some flavor of good birth and training, as about a fallen angel; something long, lithe, and courtly in the person; something aquiline and darkling in the face. Thevenin, poor soul, was in great feather: he had done a good

stroke of knavery that afternoon in the Faubourg St. Jacques, and all night he had been gaining from Montigny. A flat smile illuminated his face; his bald head shone rosily in a garland of red curls; his little protuberant stomach shook with silent chucklings as he swept in his gains.

"Doubles or quits?" said Thevenin.

Montigny nodded grimly.

"*Some may prefer to dine in state,*" wrote Villon, "*On bread and cheese on silver plate.* Or—or—help me out, Guido!"

Tabary giggled.

"*Or parsley on a silver dish,*" scribbled the poet.

The wind was freshening without; it drove the snow before it, and sometimes raised its voice in a victorious whoop, and made sepulchral grumblings in the chimney. The cold was growing sharper as the night went on. Villon, protruding his lips, imitated the gust with something between a whistle and a groan. It was an eerie, uncomfortable talent of the poet's, much detested by the Picardy monk.

"Can't you hear it rattle in the gibbet?" said Villon. "They are all dancing the devil's jig on nothing, up there. You may dance, my gallants, you'll be none the warmer! Whew, what a gust! Down went somebody just now! A medlar the fewer on the three-legged medlar-tree!—I say, Dom Nicolas, it 'll be cold to-night on the St. Denis Road?" he asked.

Dom Nicolas winked both his big eyes, and seemed to choke upon his Adam's apple. Montfaucon, the great grisly Paris gibbet, stood hard by the St. Denis Road, and the pleasantry touched him on the raw. As for Tabary, he laughed immoderately over the medlars; he had never heard anything more light-hearted; and he held his sides

and crowed. Villon fetched him a fillip on the nose, which turned his mirth into an attack of coughing.

"Oh, stop that row," said Villon, "and think of rhymes to 'fish.'"

"Doubles or quits," said Montigny doggedly.

"With all my heart," quoth Thevenin.

"Is there any more in that bottle?" asked the monk.

"Open another," said Villon. "How do you ever hope to fill that big hogshead, your body, with little things like bottles? And how do you expect to get to heaven? How many angels, do you fancy, can be spared to carry up a single monk from Picardy? Or do you think yourself another Elias—and they'll send the coach for you?"

"*Hominibus impossibile*," replied the monk, as he filled his glass.

Tabary was in ecstasies.

Villon filliped his nose again.

"Laugh at my jokes, if you like," he said.

"It was very good," objected Tabary.

Villon made a face at him. "Think of rhymes to 'fish,'" he said. "What have you to do with Latin? You'll wish you knew none of it at the great assizes, when the devil calls for Guido Tabary, clericus—the devil with the hump-back and red-hot finger-nails. Talking of the devil," he added, in a whisper, "look at Montigny!"

All three peered covertly at the gamester. He did not seem to be enjoying his luck. His mouth was a little to a side; one nostril nearly shut, and the other much inflated. The black dog was on his back, as people say, in terrifying nursery metaphor; and he breathed hard under the gruesome burden.

"He looks as if he could knife him," whispered Tabary, with round eyes.

The monk shuddered, and turned his face and spread

his open hands to the red embers. It was the cold that thus affected Dom Nicolas, and not any excess of moral sensibility.

"Come now," said Villon—"about this ballade. How does it run so far?" And beating time with his hand, he read it aloud to Tabary.

They were interrupted at the fourth rhyme by a brief and fatal movement among the gamesters. The round was completed, and Thevenin was just opening his mouth to claim another victory, when Montigny leaped up, swift as an adder, and stabbed him to the heart. The blow took effect before he had time to utter a cry, before he had time to move. A tremor or two convulsed his frame; his hands opened and shut, his heels rattled on the floor; then his head rolled backward over one shoulder with the eyes open, and Thevenin Pensete's spirit had returned to Him who made it.

Every one sprang to his feet; but the business was over in two twos. The four living fellows looked at each other in rather a ghastly fashion; the dead man contemplating a corner of the roof with a singular and ugly leer.

"My God!" said Tabary, and he began to pray in Latin.

Villon broke out into hysterical laughter. He came a step forward and ducked a ridiculous bow at Thevenin, and laughed still louder. Then he sat down suddenly, all of a heap, upon a stool, and continued laughing bitterly as though he would shake himself to pieces.

Montigny recovered his composure first.

"Let's see what he has about him," he remarked; and he picked the dead man's pockets with a practised hand, and divided the money into four equal portions on the table. "There's for you," he said.

The monk received his share with a deep sigh, and a single stealthy glance at the dead Thevenin, who was be-

ginning to sink into himself and topple sideways off the chair.

"We're all in for it," cried Villon, swallowing his mirth. "It's a hanging job for every man jack of us that's here—not to speak of those who aren't." He made a shocking gesture in the air with his raised right hand, and put out his tongue and threw his head on one side, so as to counterfeit the appearance of one who has been hanged. Then he pocketed his share of the spoil, and executed a shuffle with his feet as if to restore the circulation.

Tabary was the last to help himself; he made a dash at the money, and retired to the other end of the apartment.

Montigny stuck Thevenin upright in the chair, and drew out the dagger, which was followed by a jet of blood.

"You fellows had better be moving," he said, as he wiped the blade on his victim's doublet.

"I think we had," returned Villon with a gulp. "Damn his fat head!" he broke out. "It sticks in my throat like phlegm. What right has a man to have red hair when he is dead?" And he fell all of a heap again upon the stool, and fairly covered his face with his hands.

Montigny and Dom Nicolas laughed aloud, even Tabary feebly chiming in.

"Cry baby," said the monk.

"I always said he was a woman," added Montigny with a sneer. "Sit up, can't you?" he went on, giving another shake to the murdered body. "Tread out that fire, Nick."

But Nick was better employed; he was quietly taking Villon's purse, as the poet sat, limp and trembling, on the stool where he had been making a ballade not three minutes before. Montigny and Tabary dumbly demanded a share of the booty, which the monk silently promised as he passed the little bag into the bosom of his gown. In

many ways an artistic nature unfits a man for practical existence.

No sooner had the theft been accomplished than Villon shook himself, jumped to his feet, and began helping to scatter and extinguish the embers. Meanwhile Montigny opened the door and cautiously peered into the street. The coast was clear; there was no meddlesome patrol in sight. Still it was judged wiser to slip out severally; and as Villon was himself in a hurry to escape from the neighborhood of the dead Thevenin, and the rest were in a still greater hurry to get rid of him before he should discover the loss of his money, he was the first by general consent to issue forth into the street.

The wind had triumphed and swept all the clouds from heaven. Only a few vapors, as thin as moonlight, fleeted rapidly across the stars. It was bitter cold; and by a common optical effect, things seemed almost more definite than in the broadest daylight. The sleeping city was absolutely still: a company of white hoods, a field full of little Alps, below the twinkling stars. Villon cursed his fortune. Would it were still snowing! Now, wherever he went he left an indelible trail behind him on the glittering streets; wherever he went he was still tethered to the house by the cemetery of St. John; wherever he went he must weave, with his own plodding feet, the rope that bound him to the crime and would bind him to the gallows. The leer of the dead man came back to him with a new significance. He snapped his fingers as if to pluck up his own spirits, and choosing a street at random, stepped boldly forward in the snow.

Two things preoccupied him as he went: the aspect of the gallows at Montfaucon in this bright windy phase of the night's existence, for one; and for another, the look of the dead man with his bald head and garland of red

curls. Both struck cold upon his heart, and he kept quickening his pace as if he could escape from unpleasant thoughts by mere fleetness of foot. Sometimes he looked back over his shoulder with a sudden nervous jerk; but he was the only moving thing in the white streets, except when the wind swooped round a corner and threw up the snow, which was beginning to freeze, in spouts of glittering dust.

Suddenly he saw, a long way before him, a black clump and a couple of lanterns. The clump was in motion, and the lanterns swung as though carried by men walking. It was a patrol. And though it was merely crossing his line of march, he judged it wiser to get out of eyeshot as speedily as he could. He was not in the humor to be challenged, and he was conscious of making a very conspicuous mark upon the snow. Just on his left hand there stood a great hotel, with some turrets and a large porch before the door; it was half-ruinous, he remembered, and had long stood empty; and so he made three steps of it and jumped inside the shelter of the porch. It was pretty dark inside, after the glimmer of the snowy streets, and he was groping forward with outspread hands, when he stumbled over some substance which offered an indescribable mixture of resistances, hard and soft, firm and loose. His heart gave a leap, and he sprang two steps back and stared dreadfully at the obstacle. Then he gave a little laugh of relief. It was only a woman, and she dead. He knelt beside her to make sure upon this latter point. She was freezing cold, and rigid like a stick. A little ragged finery fluttered in the wind about her hair, and her cheeks had been heavily rouged that same afternoon. Her pockets were quite empty; but in her stocking, underneath the garter, Villon found two of the small coins that went by the name of whites. It was little enough; but it was always some-

thing; and the poet was moved with a deep sense of pathos that she should have died before she had spent her money. That seemed to him a dark and pitiable mystery; and he looked from the coins in his hand to the dead woman, and back again to the coins, shaking his head over the riddle of man's life. Henry V. of England, dying at Vincennes just after he had conquered France, and this poor jade cut off by a cold draught in a great man's doorway, before she had time to spend her couple of whites—it seemed a cruel way to carry on the world. Two whites would have taken such a little while to squander; and yet it would have been one more good taste in the mouth, one more smack of the lips, before the devil got the soul, and the body was left to birds and vermin. He would like to use all his tallow before the light was blown out and the lantern broken.

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, he was feeling, half-mechanically, for his purse. Suddenly his heart stopped beating; a feeling of cold scales passed up the back of his legs, and a cold blow seemed to fall upon his scalp. He stood petrified for a moment; then he felt again with one feverish movement; and then his loss burst upon him, and he was covered with perspiration. To spendthrifts money is so living and actual—it is such a thin veil between them and their pleasures! There is only one limit to their fortune—that of time; and a spendthrift with only a few crowns is the Emperor of Rome until they are spent. For such a person to lose his money is to suffer the most shocking reverse, and fall from heaven to hell, from all to nothing, in a breath. And all the more if he has put his head in the halter for it; if he may be hanged to-morrow for that same purse, so dearly earned, so foolishly departed. Villon stood and cursed; he threw the two whites into the street; he shook his fist at heaven; he

stamped, and was not horrified to find himself trampling the poor corpse. Then he began rapidly to retrace his steps toward the house beside the cemetery. He had forgotten all fear of the patrol, which was long gone by at any rate, and had no idea but that of his lost purse. It was in vain that he looked right and left upon the snow; nothing was to be seen. He had not dropped it in the streets. Had it fallen in the house? He would have liked dearly to go in and see; but the idea of the grisly occupant unmanned him. And he saw besides, as he drew near, that their efforts to put out the fire had been unsuccessful; on the contrary, it had broken into a blaze, and a changeful light played in the chinks of the door and window, and revived his terror for the authorities and Paris gibbet.

He returned to the hotel with the porch, and groped about upon the snow for the money he had thrown away in his childish passion. But he could only find one white; the other had probably struck sideways and sunk deeply in. With a single white in his pocket, all his projects for a rousing night in some wild tavern vanished utterly away. And it was not only pleasure that fled laughing from his grasp; positive discomfort, positive pain, attacked him as he stood ruefully before the porch. His perspiration had dried upon him; and though the wind had now fallen, a binding frost was setting in stronger with every hour, and he felt benumbed and sick at heart. What was to be done? Late as was the hour, improbable as was success, he would try the house of his adopted father, the chaplain of St. Benoît.

He ran there all the way, and knocked timidly. There was no answer. He knocked again and again, taking heart with every stroke; and at last steps were heard approaching from within. A barred wicket fell open in the iron-studded door, and emitted a gush of yellow light.

"Hold up your face to the wicket," said the chaplain from within.

"It's only me," whimpered Villon.

"Oh, it's only you, is it?" returned the chaplain; and he cursed him with foul unpriestly oaths for disturbing him at such an hour, and bade him be off to hell, where he came from.

"My hands are blue to the wrists," pleaded Villon; "my feet are dead and full of twinges; my nose aches with the sharp air; the cold lies at my heart. I may be dead before morning. Only this once, father, and before God I will never ask again."

"You should have come earlier," said the ecclesiastic, coolly. "Young men require a lesson now and then." He shut the wicket and retired deliberately into the interior of the house.

Villon was beside himself; he beat upon the door with his hands and feet, and shouted hoarsely after the chaplain.

"Wormy old fox," he cried. "If I had my hand under your twist, I would send you flying headlong into the bottomless pit."

A door shut in the interior, faintly audible to the poet down long passages. He passed his hand over his mouth with an oath. And then the humor of the situation struck him, and he laughed and looked lightly up to heaven, where the stars seemed to be winking over his discomfiture.

What was to be done? It looked very like a night in the frosty streets. The idea of the dead woman popped into his imagination, and gave him a hearty fright; what had happened to her in the early night might very well happen to him before morning. And he so young! and with such immense possibilities of disorderly amusement before him! He felt quite pathetic over the notion of his own fate, as if it had been some one else's, and made a lit-

tle imaginative vignette of the scene in the morning when they should find his body.

He passed all his chances under review, turning the white between his thumb and forefinger. Unfortunately he was on bad terms with some old friends who would once have taken pity on him in such a plight. He had lampooned them in verses, he had beaten and cheated them; and yet now, when he was in so close a pinch, he thought there was at least one who might perhaps relent. It was a chance. It was worth trying at least, and he would go and see.

On the way, two little accidents happened to him which colored his musings in a very different manner. For, first, he fell in with the track of a patrol, and walked in it for some yards, although it lay out of his direction. And this spirited him up; at least he had confused his trail; for he was still possessed with the idea of people tracking him all about Paris over the snow, and collaring him next morning before he was awake. The other matter affected him very differently. He passed a street corner, where, not so long before, a woman and her child had been devoured by wolves. This was just the kind of weather, he reflected, when wolves might take it into their heads to enter Paris again; and a lone man in these deserted streets would run the chance of something worse than a mere scare. He stopped and looked upon the place with unpleasant interest—it was a centre where several lanes intersected each other; and he looked down them all one after another, and held his breath to listen, lest he should detect some galloping black things on the snow or hear the sound of howling between him and the river. He remembered his mother telling him the story and pointing out the spot, while he was yet a child. His mother! If he only knew where she lived, he might make sure at least

of shelter. He determined he would inquire upon the morrow: nay, he would go and see her, too, poor old girl! So thinking, he arrived at his destination—his last hope for the night.

The house was quite dark, like its neighbors, and yet after a few taps, he heard a movement overhead, a door opening, and a cautious voice asking who was there. The poet named himself in a loud whisper, and waited, not without some trepidation, the result. Nor had he to wait long. A window was suddenly opened, and a pailful of slops splashed down upon the doorstep. Villon had not been unprepared for something of the sort, and had put himself as much in shelter as the nature of the porch admitted; but for all that, he was deplorably drenched below the waist. His hose began to freeze almost at once. Death from cold and exposure stared him in the face; he remembered he was of phthisical tendency, and began coughing tentatively. But the gravity of the danger steadied his nerves. He stopped a few hundred yards from the door where he had been so rudely used, and reflected with his finger to his nose. He could only see one way of getting a lodging, and that was to take it. He had noticed a house not far away which looked as if it might be easily broken into, and thither he betook himself promptly, entertaining himself on the way with the idea of a room still hot, with a table still loaded with the remains of supper, where he might pass the rest of the black hours, and whence he should issue, on the morrow, with an armful of valuable plate. He even considered on what viands and what wines he should prefer; and as he was calling the roll of his favorite dainties, roast fish presented itself to his mind with an odd mixture of amusement and horror.

"I shall never finish that ballade," he thought to him-

self; and then, with another shudder at the recollection, "Oh, damn his fat head!" he repeated fervently, and spat upon the snow.

The house in question looked dark at first sight; but as Villon made a preliminary inspection in search of the handiest point of attack, a little twinkle of light caught his eye from behind a curtained window.

"The devil!" he thought. "People awake! Some student or some saint, confound the crew! Can't they get drunk and lie in bed snoring like their neighbors! What's the good of curfew, and poor devils of bell-ringers jumping at a rope's-end in bell-towers? What's the use of day, if people sit up all night? The gripes to them!" He grinned as he saw where his logic was leading him. "Every man to his business, after all," added he, "and if they're awake, by the Lord, I may come by a supper honestly for this once, and cheat the devil."

He went boldly to the door, and knocked with an assured hand. On both previous occasions he had knocked timidly and with some dread of attracting notice; but now, when he had just discarded the thought of a burglarious entry, knocking at a door seemed a mighty simple and innocent proceeding. The sound of his blows echoed through the house with thin, phantasmal reverberations, as though it were quite empty; but these had scarcely died away before a measured tread drew near, a couple of bolts were withdrawn, and one wing was opened broadly, as though no guile or fear of guile were known to those within. A tall figure of a man, muscular and spare, but a little bent, confronted Villon. The head was massive in bulk, but finely sculptured; the nose blunt at the bottom but refining upward to where it joined a pair of strong and honest eyebrows; the mouth and eyes surrounded with delicate markings, and the whole face based upon a thick

white beard, boldly and squarely trimmed. Seen as it was by the light of a flickering hand-lamp, it looked perhaps nobler than it had a right to do; but it was a fine face, honorable rather than intelligent, strong, simple, and righteous.

"You knock late, sir," said the old man in resonant, courteous tones.

Villon cringed, and brought up many servile words of apology; at a crisis of this sort, the beggar was uppermost in him, and the man of genius hid his head with confusion.

"You are cold," repeated the old man, "and hungry? Well, step in." And he ordered him into the house with a noble enough gesture.

"Some great seigneur," thought Villon, as his host, setting down the lamp on the flagged pavement of the entry, shot the bolts once more into their places.

"You will pardon me if I go in front," he said, when this was done; and he preceded the poet up-stairs into a large apartment, warmed with a pan of charcoal and lit by a great lamp hanging from the roof. It was very bare of furniture; only some gold plate on a sideboard; some folios; and a stand of armor between the windows. Some smart tapestry hung upon the walls, representing the crucifixion of our Lord in one piece, and in another a scene of shepherds and shepherdesses by a running stream. Over the chimney was a shield of arms.

"Will you seat yourself," said the old man, "and forgive me if I leave you? I am alone in my house to-night, and if you are to eat I must forage for you myself."

No sooner was his host gone than Villon leaped from the chair on which he just seated himself, and began examining the room, with the stealth and passion of a cat. He weighed the gold flagons in his hand, opened all the folios, and investigated the arms upon the shield, and the

stuff with which the seats were lined. He raised the window-curtains, and saw that the windows were set with rich stained glass in figures, so far as he could see, of martial import. Then he stood in the middle of the room, drew a long breath, and retaining it with puffed cheeks, looked round and round him, turning on his heels, as if to impress every feature of the apartment on his memory.

"Seven pieces of plate," he said. "If there had been ten I would have risked it. A fine house, and a fine old master, so help me all the saints."

And just then, hearing the old man's tread returning along the corridor, he stole back to his chair, and began toasting his wet legs before the charcoal pan.

His entertainer had a plate of meat in one hand and a jug of wine in the other. He set down the plate upon the table, motioning Villon to draw in his chair, and going to the sideboard, brought back two goblets, which he filled.

"I drink to your better fortune," he said, gravely touching Villon's cup with his own.

"To our better acquaintance," said the poet, growing bold. A mere man of the people would have been awed by the courtesy of the old seigneur, but Villon was hardened in that matter; he had made mirth for great lords before now, and found them as black rascals as himself. And so he devoted himself to the viands with a ravenous gusto, while the old man, leaning backward, watched him with steady, curious eyes.

"You have blood on your shoulder, my man," he said.

Montigny must have laid his wet right hand upon him as he left the house. He cursed Montigny in his heart.

"It was none of my shedding," he stammered.

"I had not supposed so," returned his host quietly. "A brawl?"

"Well, something of that sort," Villon admitted with a quaver.

"Perhaps a fellow murdered?"

"Oh, no, not murdered," said the poet, more and more confused. "It was all fair play—murdered by accident. I had no hand in it, God strike me dead!" he added fervently.

"One rogue the fewer, I dare say," observed the master of the house.

"You may dare to say that," agreed Villon, infinitely relieved. "As big a rogue as there is between here and Jerusalem. He turned up his toes like a lamb. But it was a nasty thing to look at. I dare say you've seen dead men in your time, my lord?" he added, glancing at the armor.

"Many," said the old man. "I have followed the wars, as you imagine."

Villon laid down his knife and fork, which he had just taken up again.

"Were any of them bald?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, and with hair as white as mine."

"I don't think I would mind the white so much," said Villon. "His was red." And he had a return of his shuddering and tendency to laughter, which he drowned with a great draught of wine. "I'm a little put out when I think of it," he went on. "I knew him—damn him! And the cold gives a man fancies—or the fancies give a man cold, I don't know which."

"Have you any money?" asked the old man.

"I have one white," returned the poet, laughing. "I got it out of a dead jade's stocking in a porch. She was as dead as Cæsar, poor wench, and as cold as a church, with bits of ribbon sticking in her hair. This is a hard world in winter for wolves and wenches and poor rogues like me."

"I," said the old man, "am Enguerrand de la Feuillée, seigneur se Brisetout, bailly du Patatrac. Who and what may you be?"

Villon rose and made a suitable reverence. "I am called Francis Villon," he said, "a poor Master of Arts of this university. I know some Latin, and a deal of vice. I can make chansons, ballades, lais, virelais, and roundels, and I am very fond of wine. I was born in a garret, and I shall not improbably die upon the gallows. I may add, my lord, that from this night forward I am your lordship's very obsequious servant to command."

"No servant of mine," said the knight; "my guest for this evening, and no more."

"A very grateful guest," said Villon, politely; and he drank in dumb show to his entertainer.

"You are shrewd," began the old man, tapping his forehead, "very shrewd; you have learning; you are a clerk; and yet you take a small piece of money off a dead woman in the street. Is it not a kind of theft?"

"It is a kind of theft much practised in the wars, my lord."

"The wars are the field of honor," returned the old man proudly. "There a man plays his life upon the cast; he fights in the name of his lord the king, his Lord God, and all their lordships the holy saints and angels."

"Put it," said Villon, "that I were really a thief, should I not play my life also, and against heavier odds?"

"For gain, and not for honor."

"Gain?" repeated Villon with a shrug. "Gain! The poor fellow wants supper, and takes it. So does the soldier in a campaign. Why, what are all these requisitions we hear so much about? If they are not gain to those who take them, they are loss enough to the others. The men-at-arms drink by a good fire, while the burgher bites his

nails to buy them wine and wood. I have seen a good many ploughmen swinging on trees about the country; ay, I have seen thirty on one elm, and a very poor figure they made; and when I asked some one how all these came to be hanged, I was told it was because they could not scrape together enough crowns to satisfy the men-at-arms."

"These things are a necessity of war, which the low-born must endure with constancy. It is true that some captains drive overhard; there are spirits in every rank not easily moved by pity; and, indeed, many follow arms who are no better than brigands."

"You see," said the poet, "you cannot separate the soldier from the brigand; and what is a thief but an isolated brigand with circumspect manners? I steal a couple of mutton chops, without so much as disturbing the farmer's sheep; the farmer grumbles a bit, but sups none the less wholesomely on what remains. You come up blowing gloriously on a trumpet, take away the whole sheep, and beat the farmer pitifully into the bargain. I have no trumpet; I am only Tom, Dick, or Harry; I am a rogue and a dog, and hanging's too good for me—with all my heart—but just you ask the farmer which of us he prefers, just find out which of us he lies awake to curse on cold nights."

"Look at us two," said his lordship. "I am old, strong, and honored. If I were turned from my house to-morrow, hundreds would be proud to shelter me. Poor people would go out and pass the night in the streets with their children, if I merely hinted that I wished to be alone. And I find you up, wandering homeless, and picking farthings off dead women by the wayside! I fear no man and nothing; I have seen you tremble and lose countenance at a word. I wait God's summons contentedly in my own house, or, if it please the king to call me out again, upon

the field of battle. You look for the gallows; a rough, swift death, without hope or honor. Is there no difference between these two?"

"As far as to the moon," Villon acquiesced. "But if I had been born lord of Brisetout, and you had been the poor scholar Francis, would the difference have been any the less? Should not I have been warming my knees at this charcoal pan, and would not you have been groping for farthings in the snow? Should not I have been the soldier, and you the thief?"

"A thief!" cried the old man. "I a thief! If you understood your words, you would repent them."

Villon turned out his hands with a gesture of inimitable impudence. "If your lordship had done me the honor to follow my argument!" he said.

"I do you too much honor in submitting to your presence," said the knight. "Learn to curb your tongue when you speak with old and honorable men, or some one hastier than I may reprove you in a sharper fashion." And he rose and paced the lower end of the apartment, struggling with anger and antipathy. Villon surreptitiously refilled his cup, and settled himself more comfortably in the chair, crossing his knees and leaning his head upon one hand and the elbow against the back of the chair. He was now replete and warm; and he was in nowise frightened for his host, having gauged him as justly as was possible between two such different characters. The night was far spent, and in a very comfortable fashion after all; and he felt morally certain of a safe departure on the morrow.

"Tell me one thing," said the old man, pausing in his walk. "Are you really a thief?"

"I claim the sacred rights of hospitality," returned the poet. "My lord, I am."

"You are very young," the knight continued.

"I should never have been so old," replied Villon, showing his fingers, "if I had not helped myself with these ten talents. They have been my nursing mothers and my nursing fathers."

"You may still repent and change."

"I repent daily," said the poet. "There are few people more given to repentance than poor Francis. As for change, let somebody change my circumstances. A man must continue to eat, if it were only that he may continue to repent."

"The change must begin in the heart," returned the old man solemnly.

"My dear lord," answered Villon, "do you really fancy that I steal for pleasure? I hate stealing, like any other piece of work or danger. My teeth chatter when I see a gallows. But I must eat, I must drink, I must mix in society of some sort. What the devil! Man is not a solitary animal—*Cui Deus fœminam tradit.* Make me king's pantler—make me abbot of St. Denis; make me bailly of the Patatrac; and then I shall be changed indeed. But as long as you leave me the poor scholar Francis Villon, without a farthing, why, of course, I remain the same."

"The grace of God is all-powerful."

"I should be a heretic to question it," said Francis. "It has made you lord of Brisetout, and bailly of the Patatrac; it has given me nothing but the quick wits under my hat and these ten toes upon my hands. May I help myself to wine? I thank you respectfully. By God's grace, you have a very superior vintage."

The lord of Brisetout walked to and fro with his hands behind his back. Perhaps he was not yet quite settled in his mind about the parallel between thieves and soldiers;

perhaps Villon had interested him by some cross-thread of sympathy; perhaps his wits were simply muddled by so much unfamiliar reasoning; but whatever the cause, he somehow yearned to convert the young man to a better way of thinking, and could not make up his mind to drive him forth again into the street.

"There is something more than I can understand in this," he said, at length. "Your mouth is full of subtleties, and the devil has led you very far astray; but the devil is only a very weak spirit before God's truth, and all his subtleties vanish at a word of true honor, like darkness at morning. Listen to me once more. I learned long ago that a gentleman should live chivalrously and lovingly to God, and the king, and his lady; and though I have seen many strange things done, I have still striven to command my ways upon that rule. It is not only written in all noble histories, but in every man's heart, if he will take care to read. You speak of food and wine, and I know very well that hunger is a difficult trial to endure; but you do not speak of other wants; you say nothing of honor, of faith to God and other men, of courtesy, of love without reproach. It may be that I am not very wise—and yet I think I am—but you seem to me like one who has lost his way and made a great error in life. You are attending to the little wants, and you have totally forgotten the great and only real ones, like a man who should be doctoring a toothache on the Judgment Day. For such things as honor and love and faith are not only nobler than food and drink, but, indeed, I think that we desire them more, and suffer more sharply for their absence. I speak to you as I think you will most easily understand me. Are you not, while careful to fill your belly, disregarding another appetite in your heart, which spoils the pleasure of your life and keeps you continually wretched?"

Villon was sensibly nettled under all this sermonizing. "You think I have no sense of honor!" he cried. "I'm poor enough, God knows! It's hard to see rich people with their gloves, and you blowing your hands. An empty belly is a bitter thing, although you speak so lightly of it. If you had had as many as I, perhaps you would change your tune. Anyway, I'm a thief—make the most of that—but I'm not a devil from hell, God strike me dead. I would have you to know I've an honor of my own, as good as yours, though I don't prate about it all day long, as if it were a God's miracle to have any. It seems quite natural to me; I keep it in its box till it's wanted. Why now, look you here, how long have I been in this room with you? Did you not tell me you were alone in the house? Look at your gold plate! You're strong, if you like, but you're old and unarmed, and I have my knife. What did I want but a jerk of the elbow, and here would have been you with the cold steel in your bowels, and there would have been me, linking in the streets, with an armful of gold cups! Did you suppose I hadn't wit enough to see that? And I scorned the action. There are your damned goblets, as safe as in a church; there are you, with your heart ticking as good as new; and here am I, ready to go out again as poor as I came in, with my one white that you threw in my teeth! And you think I have no sense of honor—God strike me dead!"

The old man stretched out his right arm. "I will tell you what you are," he said. "You are a rogue, my man, an impudent and a black-hearted rogue and vagabond. I have passed an hour with you. Oh! believe me, I feel myself disgraced! And you have eaten and drank at my table. But now I am sick at your presence; the day has come, and the night-bird should be off to his roost. Will you go before, or after?"

"Which you please," returned the poet, rising. "I believe you to be strictly honorable." He thoughtfully emptied his cup. "I wish I could add you were intelligent," he went on, knocking on his head with his knuckles. "Age, age! the brains stiff and rheumatic."

The old man preceded him from a point of self-respect; Villon followed, whistling, with his thumbs in his girdle.

"God pity you," said the lord of Brisetout at the door.

"Good-bye, papa," returned Villon, with a yawn. "Many thanks for the cold mutton."

The door closed behind him. The dawn was breaking over the white roofs. A chill, uncomfortable morning ushered in the day. Villon stood and heartily stretched himself in the middle of the road.

"A very dull old gentleman," he thought. "I wonder what his goblets may be worth."

GREAT SHORT-STORIES

VOLUME TWO

I

THE MODERN SHORT-STORY

I

The Modern Short-Story

I

THE evolution of the short-story has already been treated in a preceding essay; it remains now to examine the characteristics of its modern form. This examination is the more necessary because it is in its modern form alone that the short-story has justified itself as a high form of art and a permanent feature of English literature. This statement does not preclude a just recognition of its earlier forms in classic literature. As we have already seen, two at least of the stories in the Decameron are perfect examples of both manner and method. The same thing may be said of Apuleius, whose story of *Eros and Psyche* is one of the most famous and exquisite of all stories, admirable alike in perfection of atmosphere, in tenderness and charm, and in poetic suggestion. But while English writers have been undoubtedly influenced by these masterpieces, very few of the older writers made the least effort to comprehend the principles of art which governed them. And for this forgetfulness there are several reasons which lie in the conditions of English literature itself.

The chief of these reasons is that the English novel in its earlier forms was planned upon a method which was at once elaborate and discursive. Defoe and Richardson,

unlike at almost every point, were alike in this, that they aimed at giving complete histories of the characters they described in their fiction. Defoe gives us the detailed biography of Roxana from childhood to old age; Richardson spares us no detail in the fortunes of Clarissa Harlowe. The same method characterizes the work of Scott, of Dickens, of Thackeray, of George Eliot, of George Meredith; the only difference being the scale of the canvas. A tradition was thus set up, the strength and authority of which is evident in the conjunction of names so widely separated by both time and achievement. And in literature more completely than in any other realm of art, unless it be that of painting, traditions are apt to maintain their authority long after their vital sanction is dissolved.

Again, there were certain mechanical conditions of authorship which gave force to this tradition. To the readers of a leisurely age a work of fiction scarcely demanded attention unless it were planned upon a full scale. Such readers asked not for anecdotes but histories. With ample time to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest a book, they would have resented brevity as a species of imposture. Thus the older works of fiction are uniformly works of great length. The average length of the larger novels of Dickens is about four hundred thousand words, and Thackeray in *Vanity Fair* and Charles Reade in *The Cloister and the Hearth* are equally lengthy. Nor is length the sole evidence of this tradition. Dickens peoples the stage of a single novel with from seventy to eighty figures, each vital, distinct, and admirably featured. Put in comparison with such works the modern popular novel, and what do we find? In length it will probably not exceed a hundred thousand words, and if it contain from a dozen to twenty figures, it will give the impression of a crowded stage.

It must also be remembered that until quite recent years the three-volume novel was the accepted form of British fiction. The length of a novel was thus arbitrarily fixed, and an author, whatever the material of his story was bound to fill a certain number of printed pages. Not only length, but a certain mechanically fixed standard of length, was thus traditional. A curious instance of the working of this tradition is afforded in the publication of two separate books, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey*, as a three-volume novel, in deference, it must be supposed, as Mr. Shorter states, to the passion of the publisher for this mode of publication. It will be easily seen that under such conditions there could be no demand for a short-story, and the author who attempted to work in this medium was certain to incur the distrust of publishers, whose first business being to furnish the public with what it likes, rarely have the daring to challenge the public with some form of art which it does not demand.

But what of magazines? British magazines, until quite recent times, offered very little opportunity to the short-story writer. For the most part the older magazines were given over to the tradition of the long serial story. *Blackwood's* was in some respects a notable exception; and other magazines, such as the old *Cornhill*, might be mentioned which gave opportunities to the short-story writer. But the very predominance given in these magazines to the long serial story by some popular author, was a tacit declaration that the short-story was esteemed an inferior form of literary art. And naturally under such conditions the short-story was so considered by both the author and the public. It was regarded as ephemeral, fugitive, and almost a derogation of genius. To the reader, intent upon the large canvas of the serial story, it was the decent make-

weight of the magazine; to its author, who would much rather have been writing the serial, it was a mere pot-boiler. To each it was at best a by-product of fiction, to produce which required little art, and certainly not an art which had laws, principles, forms, methods, and difficulties, peculiarly its own. It is worth remark that this estimate of the short-story is even yet not wholly extinct. Nothing is more common than for a publisher to inform a young author that short-stories do not sell, and to persuade him to devote his energies to the production of the regulation novel. Nor is this verdict wholly based upon commercial values; it is really the result of a fixed opinion on the part of the publisher that the short-story is an inferior form of art.

The critical value of these statements may be easily verified by a study of the earlier specimens of the British short-story. The chief impression derived from such a study is the almost total lack of any *standard* of art. If the story succeeds, it appears to be by accident rather than design. Sometimes it is interpolated into the text of a novel by the most haphazard and clumsy means—a favorite device of Dickens. Sometimes it is really a long novel abbreviated; that is to say, it contains the plot for a long novel, and is short only by accident. Sometimes it consists of several incidents more or less closely connected. No critical reader needs to be told that these are fatal faults. For the least exigent standards of art demand of the short-story, first, that it shall stand alone, because it is organically separate and complete in itself, both in regard to incident and structure. Second, that it is short because it cannot be long, its entire impressiveness lying in its brevity and intensity. And, third, that it shall consist not of several incidents, but of one incident. It may be an anecdote; it may be a passage of history, a dramatic

moment, an emotional crisis; but whatever be its theme, it must have pyschological completeness, brevity, and complete unity of incident.

In French literature these conditions have been thoroughly understood, and hence the honorable place given to the *Conte*, and the great reputation achieved by writers like Guy de Maupassant. But in British literature the appreciation of these conditions has been of very slow growth. So long as the only popular form of fiction was the long novel, and so long as the short-story was esteemed a mere by-product of fiction, this was bound to be the case. No man writes well in a medium which is generally despised, and no man who has to live by writing, as most writers have, will choose a despised and unpopular medium for his serious efforts. But during the last twenty years a great change has taken place. The downfall of the three-volume novel, the rapid rise and growth of magazines, the demand of hurried readers for forms of fiction that make a direct and rapid appeal to the imagination, the influence of the French *Conte* upon English writers—these, and many other causes, have contributed to the change. To despise the short-story is no longer possible to the critic who has before him the amazing work of Rudyard Kipling. To treat it as a by-product would be an absurd act for a critic who witnesses, and must needs applaud, the growth of Kipling's fame. Gradually men have come to see that a perfect short-story demands an art even more delicate and rare than a novel. And they have come to see also that it is a thing not different in degree, but in kind. It does not follow that because a man is a great novelist he is also a competent writer of the short-story. The gifts are compatible, indeed, but not necessarily so. They are scarcely less distinct than the gifts of the novelist and the dramatist. And, indeed, the true short-story

comes nearer to the domain of the dramatist than the novelist; for it is in the truest sense a dramatic moment, which seizes on us by its intensity, its swift dynamic, its direct appeal.

This is what the short-story ought to do, and it is what the truly great short-story always does.

II

The point at which any true appreciation of the short-story begins is the clear perception that it is a distinct form of art; and the reason why the older novelists so rarely succeeded in the short-story is that they did not apprehend this. If we bear in mind the three principles already enunciated, that the short-story must be complete in itself, that it is short because it cannot be long, and that it consists of a single incident, we can readily apply a critical test, which, while not infallible, nevertheless affords a valuable means of discrimination.

Let us take the test of completeness, and apply it to Dickens's exquisite story of *Boots at the Holly-Tree Inn.* The story, as Dickens writes it, straggles over a great variety of themes. We have an embittered lover, a detailed description of a mail-coach journey, of a snow-storm, of an inn, of his own ennui, of his own curious imaginings, elaborated in thousands of words, before he reaches the real story which the boots at the Holly-Tree has to tell. No fewer than thirty-seven pages consist of extraneous matter, while the story itself is told in thirteen pages. It is not until the boots begins to speak that the story begins; up to this point we are engaged in the tedious reflections of Charles Dickens, mixed with a great amount of totally irrelevant detail. Dickens himself must have been conscious of these defects, for when he prepared the story for

a public reading, he ruthlessly cut away all about the mail-coach, the snow-storm, the struggling horses, and so forth, and came at once to the incident which the boots repeats with so much humor and pathos.

Why then did he not write the story in this form? Simply because he had not grasped the principle that a short-story must be complete in itself. The moment he brought his work to the test of oral and dramatic delivery this principle was discovered clearly enough. And it may be added that there is no better test of any story than to read it aloud. When a story is read aloud, the interest of the hearer is in exact proportion to the direct appeal of the story; and the inattention of the hearer is the sure indication of the lack of direct appeal. The hearer of a spoken story resents everything in the nature of excrescence; he finds mere description tedious; he is intent only on the living issue. Dickens discovered this when he submitted his work to an oral test; the true short-story writer will not need such a test to teach him the law of dramatic completeness.

In contrast let us take such a story as Kipling's *Matter of Fact*, not because it is his best story, but because here also there is a great amount of description. But with Kipling the description is vital to the story, whereas in Dickens it is not. The story begins abruptly with a rapid sketch of three journalists on a tramp steamer making for Southampton. The dramatic note is instantly struck in the cry of the sweating steersman that something is wrong with the sea, that it is bewitched. To describe this sea, with its oily surface, its sudden inexplicable upheaval and run of gray water, is legitimate art, because it is necessary to the fearful apparition of the wounded sea-serpent, flung up from the ice-cold depths of ocean by the explosion of a submarine volcano. And although the story ends in London, yet its unity is never violated; and, more

wonderful still, although it ends in ridicule and humor, yet its impression of horror is not destroyed.

In this case Kipling's powers of description do not hinder his story; they are not felt to be an excrescence; and for this reason, that they are vitally necessary to the theme. We do not need the snow-storm and the mail-coach to explain the eloping children in Dickens's story; we do need the horror of the bewitched sea to explain the state of mind in the three journalists. We can cut away three-fourths of Dickens's story, as he himself did when he made it a public reading, without essential loss, and indeed with positive gain; we cannot spare a single sentence of Kipling's without deterioration of the total effect. The one does not obey the law of essential completeness, and the other does.

Let us apply the second test—that the short-story is short because it cannot be long. A good example of the reverse of this principle may be found in Hardy's great tale of *The Withered Arm.* It is a most dramatic story, and may rank among the great achievements of Hardy's genius. It concerns a group of persons, each drawn with vital truth: a farmer who brings home a young and sweet woman as his bride; a wronged woman, who has a son by the farmer; and a wise man, or wizard. The bride's arm withers, and she loses the love of her husband. The illegitimate son commits arson, and is condemned to death. The young wife goes to the gaol that she may put her withered arm on the neck of a man newly hanged, having been told by the wizard that this is an ancient form of cure. The hanged man is her husband's son, and she meets her husband, as he stands overwhelmed with grief and contrition beside his son's corpse. Here is a story capable of great elaboration. Considered only as a plot, it is as full of dramatic possibilities as *Tess of the D'Urbervilles.* Obviously it might have been treated with the

same fulness; all that is needed is an elaboration of incidents, such as Hardy excels in; as, for example, the previous history of the wronged woman, the events leading up to the marriage of the farmer, the character of the outcast son, and the general background of country life and manners. So treated it might have taken rank with the greatest of Hardy's novels; Hardy chose to compress it within the limits of forty pages. But this compression is purely arbitrary. Its result is an abbreviated novel, but not a short-story. The single incident of the woman visiting the gaol to find a cure for her disease in a horrible experiment, sanctioned by superstition, might have composed a legitimate short-story; as it is, the result is a miniature novel, which has all the characteristics of the novel except its length, and none of the features of a short-story.

If we contrast with this Quiller-Couch's story of *The Drawn Blind*, we at once see the difference in method. Here also we have the story of a son who is hanged, and the pathetic invulnerable faith of the mother in his innocence. These two persons, in their mutual relations, compose the entire story. The mother is so certain of the acquittal of her son that she has prepared a feast for him on his release; when the fatal verdict is announced, she extinguishes the lights, and drops the blind. That is all. There is obviously not enough material here for a novel; but there is just enough for a successful short-story. Spread out into a novel the interest could not be sustained; and the incident itself is so dramatic that any additional incidents would weaken the effect. But as a short-story it is perfect. It could be told in no other way. And this we may take as a sufficing test. Of the short-story proper, it is always true that it could be nothing else but what it is. If it could just as well have been elab-

orated into a novel, it is not a short-story, but only a novel in miniature.

And this gives sanction to the third principle of the short-story—*viz.*, that it consists not of several related incidents but of one incident. In a sense this is untrue to nature, because in actual life every incident is related to some other incident, of which it is either the cause or the effect. But one can pluck a rose without investigating the secrets of its growth, and it is not necessary to trace that growth through all the series of its vicissitudes in order to be aware of its charm, its color, or its fragrance. If art violates nature in giving us the unrelated incident, it is for the sound reason that art leaves much to the imagination. We may know too much as well as too little for a just appreciation of art. The great artist is he who knows how to interest without fatiguing us; who gives us just enough knowledge of his theme to invest with overwhelming significance what he chooses to reveal; who makes one's imagination the confederate with his own, by leaving us to supply much which he only suggests.

Thus Dickens fails in the story already described, because he tells us more than we want to know; and many other writers fail by attempting to blend several incidents, instead of centralizing the attention on one. Hardy fails for the same reason in *The Withered Arm*, considered as a short-story; he gives us a series of incidents, legitimate enough in a novel, but confusing in a short-story. But Kipling succeeds in the best of his stories by his perfect centrality of aim. He has a single situation to depict, and he is not distracted from it for a moment by any side issues. We do not want to know anything more about his three press-men who see the dying sea-serpent than what he chooses to tell us. The central incident is the sea-serpent, and the central interest is the effect on each man's

mind of what he sees. Had he told us how the three men came together, how one had gone in quest of gold to South Africa, and another had fought in a native war, and the third had explored the Mountains of the Moon, however vividly he might have written, he would nevertheless have spoiled his story. No amount of fine writing could have atoned for confusion of interest. The finest writing in a short-story is that which takes us quickest to the very heart of the matter in hand.

The most characteristic note of the short-story is, then, *immediacy*. It is of its very essence that it should be dramatic from the start. If it fails to arrest attention with its first paragraph it is likely to fail altogether. It affords no opportunity for that slow building up of character and situation which is common in the practise of the novelist's art. This method, which is perfectly legitimate and even compulsory to the novelist, is wholly impossible to the short-story writer. The short-story stands related to the novel very much as the vivid impressionist sketch does to the painstaking picture. The picture is built up by months of toil; its final harmony is the result of thousands of little strokes, of much stippling and repainting. But the sketch is achieved with a full brush in a confident hand, and conveys its impression instantly. Oscar Wilde once said of Kipling's stories that they were "life, seen by flashes of vulgarity." One may ignore the charge of vulgarity, but there is no doubt about the flash. It was by virtue of this incomparable directness, this rapid confident brush-work, that Kipling at once arrested the attention of the public. "His name was Charlie Mears"—so Kipling begins what he calls *The Finest Story in the World*, without preface, without preliminary. No wonder the literary scribes and pharisees were offended in him. According to their traditions all stories should

begin with a leisurely approach, and there was something almost brutal in this abruptness. The Ancient School of landscape art in the same way had a tradition that there was a certain place in a landscape where a brown tree must appear, and the tradition was held sacred, until suddenly Turner startled the world with masses of living color, in which no brown tree appeared. From that hour landscape art was revolutionized. And a similar revolution of literary ideals has followed the triumph of the short-story writer. He has taught the novelists themselves the value of immediacy, and while the novelist of the older school still clings to the law of slow approach, almost all the newer writers have learned how to cut away preliminaries and to get at the heart of their story with a celerity which would have scandalized the writers of an earlier generation.

It must not be assumed, however, that because the short-story occupies but a small canvas it is therefore inferior to the novel, for this would constitute bulk as the standard of value. The entire witness of art, in all its branches, is hostile to such a conclusion. A fine intaglio may be as great a work of art as a Grecian statue; a square foot of Gerald Dow's painting is much more valuable than one of Haydon's interminable yards of canvas; and a lyric of a dozen lines by Burns is much more precious than a hundred epical pages of *The Earthly Paradise*. The fact is that it is much more difficult to write a perfect short-story than a successful novel. It demands superior gifts of concentration, of ingenuity, of fantasy, of originality, of dramatic intensity, of exquisite craftsmanship. The novel can afford to have its lapses, its relatively dull moments, its pages of reflection; it even gains by them, for they afford a necessary contrast to its dramatic climax. But the short-story can afford to have nothing of the

kind. The eagerness of its movement must be continuous and sustained. And this is perhaps why the regular novelist so rarely succeeds in the short-story. His entire training is against him. He is usually too deliberate, too discursive; his touch is not light enough, his method is not sufficiently rapid. He frequently betrays his ignorance of his medium at every turn. He writes condescendingly or reluctantly; he makes us feel that he grudges throwing away a good *motif;* or he adopts some purely mechanical device, such as combining a series of episodes, which are neither in themselves short-stories, nor in their combination a true novel. The latter method was adopted by Barrie in his *Window in Thrums,* and by Ian Maclaren in his *Bonnie Brier Bush.* The result is not unpleasant; but the various episodes do not stand by themselves, and therefore are not short-stories. For no writer will ever succeed in the art of the short-story who does not thoroughly understand that it is a form of art wholly separable from any other; and that it is also a form of art which is at once so difficult and delicate that it worthily challenges the highest qualities of genius.

As regards the throwing away of a good *motif,* it is undoubtedly true that a man cannot enter on the career of the short-story writer who is parsimonious in *motifs.* But the extravagance is more apparent than real, for the reason that the *motif* which makes a great short-story can rarely be utilized in any other way. It is possible to expand a short-story into a novel; Mr. E. W. Mason has done it successfully in *The Four Feathers.* It is possible to transform it into a play; Mr. Jerome has done it in the *Passing of the Third Floor Back.* But such instances must be ranked with the exceptions. As a rule the essential factor in a great short-story is that it can be expressed in no other way with anything like the same success. Who

would attempt to create a novel out of Kipling's sea-serpent story, out of the *Incarnation of Khrisna Mulvaney*, out of *The Finest Story in the World*? We recognize at once how impossible such a feat would be. And therein lies both the claim and the justification of the short-story. Life consists both of prolonged sequences and of flashing episodes. The first afford the material of the novelist, the second of the short-story writer. And life is so rich in episode to the observant and adventurous, that he is much more likely to suffer from embarrassment of material than from poverty. It may be true that all the plots of the novelist have been used before, but that is only because the novelist persists in the use of a certain type of plot. But the episodical wealth of life is inexhaustible. A year's study of a daily newspaper may furnish the short-story writer with more material than he is likely to utilize in a lifetime. A face seen in a crowd, gossip overheard in a tavern, a conversation at a street-door, the revelations of hostile eyes in meeting or in parting, the sudden passing of insignificant men and women across the beam of his questing search-light—these are enough to excite his imagination, to start the wheels of fantasy; and if he will but continue to see vividly the dramatic possibilities of life, and to report truthfully what he sees, he need never lack material for the warp and woof of the stories he can spin.

III

The reasons for the slow growth of the short-story among British writers have already been alluded to. So long as the three-volume novel reigned supreme, and magazines held to the tradition of the long serial, there was neither opportunity nor motive for the British writer to practise the art of short-story writing. But the conditions

which repressed the short-story in England acted powerfully for its benefit in America.

If we investigate the position of the American writer of fiction of the last century, some extremely interesting facts are noticeable. The chief of these facts is that almost all the novels read by the American public were of British origin. There was no international copyright law, and the most that a British novelist could do to secure any reward from America was to sell advance sheets of his book to an American publisher. Obviously this was a very exiguous device to protect his interests. It broke down the moment his book was pirated, which it invariably was within a few weeks of its publication in London. Not only was it pirated, but sold broadcast at extremely low prices. It is patent that the American novelist had no chance at all in this competition. Who would buy the work of a native author of local fame when he could purchase for a trifle the latest novel of Dickens or Thackeray? The result was that there was a very poor market for native fiction. The pirate publisher of those days did a great deal more than injure the British author by robbing him of his just reward; he injured yet more fatally the American author by robbing him of all chance of successful authorship.

Driven from the field of legitimate fiction by unjust competition, there was but one road to success left open to him, the magazine and the short-story. Here, at least, he was free from rivalry, for here was a demand which could not be supplied from British sources. Therefore it was to the short-story that the rising school of American writers of fiction devoted their attention. Among these writers Washington Irving, Hawthorne, and Poe stand supreme. Irving excelled in the brief sketch rather than the short-story proper. It is only at a certain heat of the

creative faculty that he attains pure narrative. Grave, wise, genial, he is apt to write with leisurely ease, in a mood of reflection rather than with directness and intensity. Hawthorne displays the same tendency, though in a much less degree. He is apt to delay his dramatic moment by philosophical observation, to be tediously analytical when the theme demands intensity, to stifle the fire of his imagination under a dull weight of pedantry. It may even be said that Hawthorne's true and fine genius often appears to work in some obstructive medium; at least, that is the impression which he frequently produces on the reader. It may have been distrust of his own powers, a kind of intellectual shyness, a native difficulty in speaking out. It may have arisen in large degree from his own inborn habits of introspection and metaphysical analysis. It may have consisted of a constantly changing combination of all these forces. But whatever it was, it was there, a resisting medium which gives the sense of effort to his work. In all his best work he conquers this obstruction. And in the short-story he is at his best. His outstanding claim is that he applies a profound psychology to the art of fiction. He deals not with the surfaces of life, but with the depths. He delights in the exploration of what Arthur Hallam called "the abyssmal depths of personality." He has a keen eye for the dramatic moment. His themes are uniformly significant, and often of extraordinary fascination. In all that concerns the technique of the short-story he is a great master. This technical excellence has been again and again recognized, and by later critics so completely that they have unhesitatingly chosen some of Hawthorne's stories as the perfect models of what a short-story ought to be.

But the true creator of the modern short-story in American literature is neither Irving nor Hawthorne; that honor

belongs to Poe. Poe brought to his task precisely those gifts most essential to achievement; a powerful reason of unusual subtlety, an imagination of extraordinary vividness, a faculty of observation only less extraordinary, and above all a mind wholly free, wholly unfettered by tradition, and almost insolently scornful of accepted canons. His self-confidence is superb; in a man less singularly gifted it would have been ridiculous. His originality is unquestioned; and the witness to this originality is found in the fact that he was the first man to recognize completely the artistic possibilities of the short-story. He found in it a sufficient vehicle for the expression of his genius. He brought to it the highest and rarest genius not only of his nation, but of his age. Both in poetry and in short-story writing Poe stands first in the literature of America.

Poe excelled equally in three kinds of story: the story of ingenuity, the story of adventure, and the story of horror. To take the first, what stories have surpassed in ingenuity *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *The Purloined Letter*? Here we have in its perfection the method of deduction which Conan Doyle has so successfully copied in his Sherlock Holmes. The same ingenuity, differently applied, distinguishes the great story of *The Gold-Bug*. Many writers have since used cryptograms and concealed in them the secrets of hidden treasure, but there is not one who has ever surpassed Poe in this kind of story. The *Descent into the Maelstrom* and *The Adventure of Hans Pfaal* are equally unique examples of the story of adventure. The latter found an imitator in Jules Verne, but the Frenchman's *Voyage to the Moon* is a dreary pedestrian performance compared with the imaginative daring of Poe's narrative. In the story of horror no one has ever pretended to rival him; and yet it may be questioned if

Stevenson would ever have written *Markheim* had not Poe first written *The Tell-Tale Heart.* The mere fact that we can thus trace the influence of Poe among the most recent and the greatest of modern story-writers is conclusive evidence of his profound originality. His was a truly seminal mind, fecund with ideas. Without models, without a single counselling voice, and without any real recognition or encouragement, he discovered the value of the short-story, endowed it with form and method, devoted his rare gifts to its perfection, and did each of these things so completely that his own stories have become classic; the value of his method has never been disputed, and the form which he gave the short-story has become the model of succeeding writers.

Perhaps, however, the chief contribution of Poe to the art of the short-story lies not so much in form or method as in fantasy. Thus, in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* he fails in immediacy. Again, in *The Gold-Bug*, the interest is wrought to the highest pitch when the treasure is found, and the explanation of the cryptogram, infinitely ingenious as it is, coming *after* the finding of the treasure, has the effect of an anticlimax. Kipling, telling the same story, would probably have commenced with the discovery of the cryptogram, and have found a true climax in the finding of the treasure. But this is, after all, to say no more than that the technique of the short-story has advanced with the practise of the art. The unique claim of Poe is that he endowed the short-story with fantasy. He gave it wings, opened the heavens of imagination to it, made it almost a form of poetry, and put it on the highest level of literary art. One fault he had which cannot be excused: he took a morbid delight in the horrible. This is a constant temptation to the short-story writer. It arises from the need to produce an in-

stant and deep impression, and such an impression is most readily produced by an illicit appeal to fear. Stevenson makes this appeal in *Thrawn Janet*; Kipling in many of his stories, notably *The Return of Imray*. In going over the vast literature of short-stories, it has been a surprise to the writer to discover how many of them are stories of pure terror. That such stories may have qualities of art is undeniable; yet simply because the appeal to terror is so easily made, it is a kind of appeal which should be very sparingly used. The use which Poe makes of it is constant and therefore illicit. This is his chief fault. Yet against it must be reckoned his extraordinary power of fantasy, and this gift raises his worst theme into the realm of the creative imagination. Poe was essentially a poet, a poet whose genius moved habitually on the darker side of life, and was deeply tainted by the morbid and the abnormal. It is because he was so essential a poet that even an illicit theme is redeemed by the wonderful splendor of the imagination with which he bathes it.

For, after all, technique is not everything, a truth upon which some insistence needs to be laid to-day, because its value is often overestimated. Thus, for example, in what must certainly be reckoned as one of the greatest of all Kipling's stories, *The Man Who Would be King*, there is a wilful disregard of the law of immediacy which he uses in many shorter stories with such superb effect. This story has three distinct episodes. The first concludes on the railway station at Marwar Junction, when he delivers Carnehan's enigmatic message to the red-bearded man in the second-class compartment. The second begins in the newspaper office when Carnehan and Dravot unfold their daring plan of becoming kings, and ends with the starting of the Afghan caravan. The third, which contains the real story, occurs three years later,

when Carnehan relates the marvellous adventures of himself and Dravot in Kafiristan, and concludes with that noble touch of fantasy, when Carnehan stands in the blinding sun, singing:

> "The Son of God goes forth to war,
> A golden crown to gain;
> His blood-red banner streams afar—
> Who follows in his train?"

The laws of technique are violated, but surely it would be the merest pedantry to insist that therefore this is not a true short-story. The sympathetic reader, thrilled with its pathos and its daring, astonished by its imaginative power, conscious of its Homeric bigness, will at once reply that it is at all events a great story, that it is indeed among the greatest of all stories in the English tongue, and he would be right. No, technique is not everything. It is no more than the servant of the shaping creative force, and must not be allowed to be its master. If it be not elastic enough to serve the end of the creative force, that force will certainly discard and transcend it. By all means let the writer study technique; it is as useful to him as the life-class and the art-school are to the artist. But let him also recollect that technique alone never yet made a great artist. It is at best but the weapon of success; for while a writer may succeed with an imperfect knowledge of technique, it is certain that he cannot succeed without the creative imagination. To forget this is to magnify the lesser things of the law and to forget the eternal verities.

And this is but to say in plainer language that in all forms of literary art it is personality that counts for most. Great writing is always the expression of great personality. It is well to be acquainted with the unities of composition, but if that is all we know, nothing awaits us

but barrenness and failure. When a Shakespeare arises, he pours such floods of flame into the old dramatic forms that they are utterly dissolved, and none regret them but the pedants, with whom form counts for more than spirit. Here, as elsewhere, it is the letter that killeth; it is the spirit that giveth life. The cardinal questions to be addressed to a writer of short-stories are these: Has he any vital message to communicate? Has he any sincere experience to impart? Has he seen life for himself, from his own angle of vision, and seen it truthfully and completely? Has he the creative force that makes us see what he sees, feel what he has felt, comprehend what he has comprehended? These are the inexorable questions, and the greatest writers of short-stories have been those who could answer them most thoroughly. Such interrogations are not to be evaded on the plea of technique; personality transcends technique. The short-story, more than any other form of literature, must have individuality; and to have it, it must be impregnated with the personality of the writer. It is from this source that it derives its color, its charm, its power to arrest and please. Poe and Kipling, Stevenson and Hawthorne write nothing that is not impregnated with personality, and this is the deepest secret of their fame. The most miraculous color in the picture is always that which is derived from the life-blood of the artist.

So far as mere technique is concerned, the American short-story writer occupies a position of indisputable primacy. America has not yet produced a novelist of the calibre of Dickens or Thackeray, of Meredith or Hardy; but it has produced a host of short-story writers of incomparable excellence. In almost every magazine may be found stories whose technical form could not be bettered by the greatest writers. This technical excellence

is largely due to the encouragement afforded to the writer by the American magazine, which is greatly superior at every point to the British. In no other country, except France, is it possible for a writer to make a reputation upon a single magazine story; but in America this has happened more than once. And hence, in the consideration of values, account must be taken of writers like Ambrose Bierce and Lloyd Osbourne, Henry James and Mrs. Deland. Each has done work so admirable that it does not suffer greatly in comparison with that of the most famous writers. In the general spirit and form of their work American short-story writers are more nearly related to French than to English literature. If any general criticism can be permitted on so vast and various a body of work, it may be said that the technique is often superior to the content.

Finally, it should be remembered that while we may codify, not without success, the essential laws which govern the short-story, no codification of these laws can be accepted as entirely complete. Strictly speaking, many forms of literature which are generally categoried as short-stories are not stories at all, but only incidents. Thus, in a recent magazine,[1] we have, side by side, two specimens of imaginative work, the one by Jack London, the other by William J. Locke; each excellent, each amenable to no other category than that of the short-story, but each absolutely different in method. Mr. London merely relates an incident of a leper-doctor who himself becomes a leper. Mr. Locke tells a story of a middle-aged man and woman, once lovers, who meet after many years; they are drawn together by powerful memories, under the magic of the African night; upon sober reflection the woman writes a

[1] *The American Magazine*, August, 1909.

letter of renunciation; the letter never reaches the man, for he, on sober reflection, has fled. This is a short-story proper. It works toward a definite dramatic climax. It ends upon the note of surprise. Mr. London's story has no climax. It closes vaguely. It is not in the proper sense a story. It is simply an incident, related with immense dramatic power. Yet it would be merest pedantry to accept Mr. Locke as a short-story teller, and disqualify Mr. London; because Mr. London's vivid and terrific picture of the leper-doctor affects us as a short-story should, in spite of its technical deficiencies. Once more the critic is warned against a fanatical passion for technique. The indulgence of such a passion leads to aridity of mind, as it did in the days of Pope, when poetry was reduced to a series of inexorable rules and by-laws. The truest critic is he who can recognize excellence in any form; who indeed is the most willing to submit his mind to the charm of a writer, the least willing to press his own preconceptions in hostility to that charm.

Enough has now been said to vindicate the short-story as a separate and distinct form of art. It is not easy, it is not even possible, to discern the working of the law of progress in imaginative literature as a whole. The critic most thoroughly possessed by the enthusiasm of modernity will hesitate to affirm that the later novelists have surpassed or even equalled the great novelists of the Victorian age. It is true that an extravagant spirit of laudation has again and again hailed some new novelist as the new Scott or the new Dickens; but in every case a very brief interval of reflection and adjustment has reduced such claims to ridicule. But while the novel has declined in excellence, there can be no doubt that the short-story has advanced by leaps and bounds. It may be confidently asserted that Stevenson is as superior to Scott, Kipling

as superior to Dickens, in the art of the short-story, as each is inferior in the novel. Scott could as little have written *A Lodging for the Night* as Stevenson could have written *Kenilworth*; and Kipling would not have failed more disastrously in a *David Copperfield* than Dickens in such a story as *The Man Who Would be King*. The fact is that such comparisons ought never to be made, because the things compared are radically different. It is not until we conceive of the two forms of art as wholly separate that we are in a position to form any correct judgment on their merits. Only as we do discern this are we able to judge aright the brilliant work of writers who have brought to the creation of the short-story gifts quite as remarkable as those of the greatest novelists, and in the exercise of these gifts have raised the short-story into an enduring and splendid form of art.

II

AN OCCURRENCE AT OWL CREEK BRIDGE

BY

Ambrose Bierce

II

An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge[1]

Ambrose Bierce

I

A MAN stood upon a railroad bridge in northern Alabama, looking down into the swift waters twenty feet below. The man's hands were behind his back, the wrists bound with a cord. A rope loosely encircled his neck. It was attached to a stout cross-timber above his head, and the slack fell to the level of his knees. Some loose boards laid upon the sleepers supporting the metals of the railway supplied a footing for him and his executioners—two private soldiers of the Federal army, directed by a sergeant, who in civil life may have been a deputy sheriff. At a short remove upon the same temporary platform was an officer in the uniform of his rank, armed. He was a captain. A sentinel at each end of the bridge stood with his rifle in the position known as "support," that is to say, vertical in front of the left shoulder, the hammer resting on the forearm thrown straight across the chest—a formal and unnatural position, enforcing an erect carriage of the body. It did not appear to be the duty of these two men to know what was occurring at the

[1] From *The Collected Works of Ambrose Bierce*, vol. ii. Copyright, 1909, by The Neale Publishing Co.

centre of the bridge; they merely blockaded the two ends of the foot-plank which traversed it.

Beyond one of the sentinels nobody was in sight; the railroad ran straight away into a forest for a hundred yards, then, curving, was lost to view. Doubtless there was an outpost further along. The other bank of the stream was open ground—a gentle acclivity crowned with a stockade of vertical tree-trunks, loopholed for rifles, with a single embrasure through which protruded the muzzle of a brass cannon commanding the bridge. Midway up the slope between the bridge and fort were the spectators—a single company of infantry in line, at "parade rest," the butts of the rifles on the ground, the barrels inclining slightly backward against the right shoulder, the hands crossed upon the stock. A lieutenant stood at the right of the line, the point of his sword upon the ground, his left hand resting upon his right. Excepting the group of four at the centre of the bridge not a man moved. The company faced the bridge, staring stonily, motionless. The sentinels, facing the banks of the stream, might have been statues to adorn the bridge. The captain stood with folded arms, silent, observing the work of his subordinates, but making no sign. Death is a dignitary who, when he comes announced, is to be received with formal manifestations of respect, even by those most familiar with him. In the code of military etiquette silence and fixity are forms of deference.

The man who was engaged in being hanged was apparently about thirty-five years of age. He was a civilian, if one might judge from his dress, which was that of a planter. His features were good—a straight nose, firm mouth, broad forehead, from which his long, dark hair was combed straight back, falling behind his ears to the collar of his well-fitting frock-coat. He wore a mustache

and pointed beard, but no whiskers; his eyes were large and dark gray, and had a kindly expression which one would hardly have expected in one whose neck was in the hemp. Evidently this was no vulgar assassin. The liberal military code makes provision for hanging many kinds of people, and gentlemen are not excluded.

The preparations being complete, the two private soldiers stepped aside, and each drew away the plank upon which he had been standing. The sergeant turned to the captain, saluted and placed himself immediately behind that officer, who in turn moved apart one pace. These movements left the condemned man and the sergeant standing on the two ends of the same plank, which spanned three of the cross-ties of the bridge. The end upon which the civilian stood almost, but not quite, reached a fourth. This plank had been held in place by the weight of the captain; it was now held by that of the sergeant. At a signal from the former the latter would step aside, the plank would tilt, and the condemned man go down between two ties. The arrangement commended itself to his judgment as simple and effective. His face had not been covered nor his eyes bandaged. He looked a moment at his "unsteadfast footing," then let his gaze wander to the swirling water of the stream racing madly beneath his feet. A piece of dancing driftwood caught his attention, and his eyes followed it down the current. How slowly it appeared to move! What a sluggish stream!

He closed his eyes in order to fix his last thoughts upon his wife and children. The water, touched to gold by the early sun, the brooding mists under the banks at some distance down the stream, the fort, the soldiers, the piece of drift—all had distracted him. And now he became conscious of a new disturbance. Striking through the thought of his dear ones was a sound he could neither ignore nor

understand, a sharp, distinct, metallic percussion like the stroke of a blacksmith's hammer upon the anvil; it had the same ringing quality. He wondered what it was, and whether immeasurably distant or near by—it seemed both. Its recurrence was regular, but as slow as the tolling of a death-knell. He awaited each stroke with impatience and—he knew not why—apprehension. The intervals of silence grew progressively longer; the delays maddening. With their greater infrequency the sounds increased in strength and sharpness. They hurt his ear like the thrust of a knife; he feared he would shriek. What he heard was the ticking of his watch.

He unclosed his eyes and saw again the water below him. "If I could free my hands," he thought, "I might throw off the noose and spring into the stream. By diving, I could evade the bullets, and, swimming vigorously, reach the bank, take to the woods, and get away home. My home, thank God, is as yet outside their lines; my wife and little ones are still beyond the invaders' farthest advance."

As these thoughts, which have here to be set down in words, were flashed into the doomed man's brain rather than evolved from it, the captain nodded to the sergeant. The sergeant stepped aside.

II

Peyton Farquhar was a well-to-do planter, of an old and highly respected Alabama family. Being a slave-owner, and, like other slave-owners, a politician, he was naturally an original secessionist and ardently devoted to the Southern cause. Circumstances of an imperious nature which it is unnecessary to relate here, had prevented him from taking service with the gallant army which had

fought the disastrous campaigns ending with the fall of Corinth, and he chafed under the inglorious restraint, longing for the release of his energies, the larger life of the soldier, the opportunity for distinction. That opportunity, he felt, would come, as it comes to all in war-time. Meanwhile he did what he could. No service was too humble for him to perform in aid of the South, no adventure too perilous for him to undertake if consistent with the character of a civilian who was at heart a soldier, and who in good faith and without too much qualification assented to at least a part of the frankly villainous dictum that all is fair in love and war.

One evening while Farquhar and his wife were sitting on a rustic bench near the entrance to his grounds, a gray-clad soldier rode up to the gate and asked for a drink of water. Mrs. Farquhar was only too happy to serve him with her own white hands. While she was gone to fetch the water, her husband approached the dusty horseman and inquired eagerly for news from the front.

"The Yanks are repairing the railroads," said the man, "and are getting ready for another advance. They have reached the Owl Creek Bridge, put it in order, and built a stockade on the other bank. The commandant has issued an order, which is posted everywhere, declaring that any civilian caught interfering with the railroad, its bridges, tunnels, or trains, will be summarily hanged. I saw the order."

"How far is it to the Owl Creek Bridge?" Farquhar asked.

"About thirty miles."

"Is there no force on this side the creek?"

"Only a picket post half a mile out, on the railroad, and a single sentinel at this end of the bridge."

"Suppose a man—a civilian and student of hanging—

should elude the picket post and perhaps get the better of the sentinel." said Farquhar, smiling, "what could he accomplish?"

The soldier reflected. "I was there a month ago," he replied. "I observed that the flood of last winter had lodged a great quantity of driftwood against the wooden pier at this end of the bridge. It is now dry, and would burn like tow."

The lady had now brought the water, which the soldier drank. He thanked her ceremoniously, bowed to her husband, and rode away. An hour later, after nightfall, he repassed the plantation, going northward in the direction from which he had come. He was a Federal scout.

III

As Peyton Farquhar fell straight downward through the bridge, he lost consciousness and was as one already dead. From this state he was awakened—ages later, it seemed to him—by the pain of a sharp pressure upon his throat, followed by a sense of suffocation. Keen, poignant agonies seemed to shoot from his neck downward through every fibre of his body and limbs. These pains seemed to flash along well-defined lines of ramification, and to beat with an inconceivably rapid periodicity. They seemed like streams of pulsating fire heating him to an intolerable temperature. As to his head, he was conscious of nothing but a feeling of fulness—of congestion. These sensations were unaccompanied by thought. The intellectual part of his nature was already effaced; he had power only to feel, and feeling was torment. He was conscious of motion. Encompassed in a luminous cloud, of which he was now merely the fiery heart, without material substance, he swung through unthinkable arcs of oscillation, like a

vast pendulum. Then all at once, with terrible suddenness, the light about him shot upward with the noise of a loud plash; a frightful roaring was in his ears, and all was cold and dark. The power of thought was restored; he knew that the rope had broken and he had fallen into the stream. There was no additional strangulation; the noose about his neck was already suffocating him, and kept the water from his lungs. To die hanging at the bottom of a river!—the idea seemed to him ludicrous. He opened his eyes in the blackness and saw above him a gleam of light, but how distant, how inaccessible! He was still sinking, for the light became fainter and fainter until it was a mere glimmer. Then it began to grow and brighten, and he knew that he was rising toward the surface—knew it with reluctance, for he was now very comfortable. "To be hanged and drowned," he thought, "that is not so bad; but I do not wish to be shot. No; I will not be shot; that is not fair."

He was not conscious of an effort, but a sharp pain in his wrists apprised him that he was trying to free his hands. He gave the struggle his attention, as an idler might observe the feat of a juggler, without interest in the outcome. What splendid effort!—what magnificent, what superhuman strength! Ah, that was a fine endeavor! Bravo! The cord fell away; his arms parted and floated upward, the hands dimly seen on each side in the growing light. He watched them with a new interest as first one and then the other pounced upon the noose at his neck. They tore it away and thrust it fiercely aside, its undulations resembling those of a water-snake. "Put it back! put it back!" He thought he shouted these words to his hands, for the undoing of the noose had been succeeded by the direst pang which he had yet experienced. His neck ached horribly; his brain was on fire; his heart,

which had been fluttering faintly, gave a great leap, trying to force itself out of his mouth. His whole body was racked and wrenched with an insupportable anguish! But his disobedient hands gave no heed to the command. They beat the water vigorously with quick, downward strokes, forcing him to the surface. He felt his head emerge; his eyes were blinded by the sunlight; his chest expanded convulsively, and with a supreme and crowning agony his lungs engulfed a great draught of air, which instantly he expelled in a shriek!

He was now in full possession of his physical senses. They were, indeed, preternaturally keen and alert. Something in the awful disturbance of his organic system had so exalted and refined them that they made record of things never before perceived. He felt the ripples upon his face and heard their separate sounds as they struck. He looked at the forest on the bank of the stream, saw the individual trees, the leaves and the veining of each leaf—saw the very insects upon them, the locusts, the brilliant-bodied flies, the gray spiders stretching their webs from twig to twig. He noted the prismatic colors in all the dewdrops upon a million blades of grass. The humming of the gnats that danced above the eddies of the stream, the beating of the dragon-flies' wings, the strokes of the water-spiders' legs, like oars which had lifted their boat—all these made audible music. A fish slid along beneath his eyes, and he heard the rush of its body parting the water.

He had come to the surface facing down the stream; in a moment the visible world seemed to wheel slowly round, himself the pivotal point, and he saw the bridge, the fort, the soldiers on the bridge, the captain, the sergeant, the two privates, his executioners. They were in silhouette against the blue sky. They shouted and ges-

ticulated, pointing at him; the captain had drawn his pistol, but did not fire; the others were unarmed. Their movements were grotesque and horrible, their forms gigantic.

Suddenly he heard a sharp report, and something struck the water smartly within a few inches of his head, spattering his face with spray. He heard a second report, and saw one of the sentinels with his rifle at his shoulder, a light cloud of blue smoke rising from the muzzle. The man in the water saw the eye of the man on the bridge gazing into his own through the sights of the rifle. He observed that it was a gray eye, and remembered having read that gray eyes were keenest, and that all famous marksmen had them. Nevertheless, this one had missed.

A counter-swirl had caught Farquhar and turned him half round; he was again looking into the forest on the bank opposite the fort. The sound of a clear, high voice in a monotonous sing-song now rang out behind him and came across the water with a distinctness that pierced and subdued all other sounds, even the beating of the ripples in his ears. Although no soldier, he had frequented camps enough to know the dread significance of that deliberate, drawling, aspirated chant; the lieutenant on shore was taking a part in the morning's work. How coldly and pitilessly—with what an even, calm intonation, presaging and enforcing tranquillity in the men—with what accurately measured intervals fell those cruel words: "Attention, company.—Shoulder arms.—Ready.—Aim.—Fire!"

Farquhar dived—dived as deeply as he could. The water roared in his ears like the voice of Niagara, yet he heard the dulled thunder of the volley, and rising again toward the surface, met shining bits of metal, singularly flattened, oscillating slowly downward. Some of them touched him on the face and hands, then fell away, con-

tinuing their descent. One lodged between his collar and neck; it was uncomfortably warm, and he snatched it out.

As he rose to the surface, gasping for breath, he saw that he had been a long time under water; he was perceptibly farther down-stream—nearer to safety! The soldiers had almost finished reloading; the metal ramrods flashed all at once in the sunshine as they were drawn from the barrels, turned in the air, and thrust into their sockets. The two sentinels fired again, independently and ineffectually.

The hunted man saw all this over his shoulder; he was now swimming vigorously with the current. His brain was as energetic as his arms and legs; he thought with the rapidity of lightning.

"The officer," he reasoned, "will not make that martinet's error a second time. It is as easy to dodge a volley as a single shot. He has probably already given the command to fire at will. God help me, I cannot dodge them all!"

An appalling plash within two yards of him, followed by a loud rushing sound, *diminuendo*, which seemed to travel back through the air to the fort and died in an explosion which stirred the very river to its deeps. A rising sheet of water, which curved over him, fell down upon him, blinded him, strangled him. The cannon had taken a hand in the game. As he shook his head free from the commotion of the smitten water, he heard the deflected shot humming through the air ahead, and in an instant it was cracking and smashing the branches in the forest beyond.

"They will not do that again," he thought; "the next time they will use a charge of grape. I must keep my eye upon the gun; the smoke will apprise me—the report arrives too late; it lags behind the missile. It is a good gun."

Suddenly he felt himself whirled round and round—spinning like a top. The water, the banks, the forest, the now distant bridge, fort and men—all were commingled and blurred. Objects were represented by their colors only; circular horizontal streaks of color—that was all he saw. He had been caught in a vortex, and was being whirled on with a velocity of advance and gyration which made him giddy and sick. In a few moments he was flung upon the gravel at the foot of the left bank of the stream—the southern bank—and behind a projecting point which concealed him from his enemies. The sudden arrest of his motion, the abrasion of one of his hands on the gravel, restored him, and he wept with delight. He dug his fingers into the sand, threw it over himself in handfuls and audibly blessed it. It looked like gold, like diamonds, rubies, emeralds; he could think of nothing beautiful which it did not resemble. The trees upon the bank were giant garden plants; he noted a definite order in their arrangement, inhaled the fragrance of their blooms. A strange, roseate light shone through the spaces among their trunks, and the wind made in their branches the music of æolian harps. He had no wish to perfect his escape, was content to remain in that enchanting spot until retaken.

A whizz and rattle of grapeshot among the branches high above his head roused him from his dream. The baffled cannoneer had fired him a random farewell. He sprung to his feet, rushed up the sloping bank, and plunged into the forest.

All that day he travelled, laying his course by the rounding sun. The forest seemed interminable; nowhere did he discover a break in it, not even a woodman's road. He had not known that he lived in so wild a region. There was something uncanny in the revelation.

By nightfall he was fatigued, footsore, famishing. The

thought of his wife and children urged him on. At last he found a road which led him in what he knew to be the right direction. It was as wide and straight as a city street, yet it seemed untravelled. No fields bordered it, no dwelling anywhere. Not so much as the barking of a dog suggested human habitation. The black bodies of the great trees formed a straight wall on both sides, terminating on the horizon in a point, like a diagram in a lesson in perspective. Overhead, as he looked up through this rift in the wood, shone great golden stars looking unfamiliar and grouped in strange constellations. He was sure they were arranged in some order which had a secret and malign significance. The wood on either side was full of singular noises, among which—once, twice, and again—he distinctly heard whispers in an unknown tongue.

His neck was in pain, and, lifting his hand to it, he found it horribly swollen. He knew that it had a circle of black where the rope had bruised it. His eyes felt congested; he could no longer close them. His tongue was swollen with thirst; he relieved its fever by thrusting it forward from between his teeth into the cool air. How softly the turf had carpeted the untravelled avenue! He could no longer feel the roadway beneath his feet!

Doubtless, despite his suffering, he fell asleep while walking, for now he sees another scene—perhaps he has merely recovered from a delirium. He stands at the gate of his own home. All is as he left it, and all bright and beautiful in the morning sunshine. He must have travelled the entire night. As he pushes open the gate and passes up the wide white walk, he sees a flutter of female garments; his wife, looking fresh and cool and sweet, steps down from the veranda to meet him. At the bottom of the steps she stands waiting, with a smile of in-

effable joy, an attitude of matchless grace and dignity. Ah, how beautiful she is! He springs forward with extended arms. As he is about to clasp her, he feels a stunning blow upon the back of the neck; a blinding white light blazes all about him, with a sound like the shock of a cannon—then all is darkness and silence!

Peyton Farquhar was dead; his body, with a broken neck, swung gently from side to side beneath the timbers of the Owl Creek Bridge.

III

THE UNEXPECTEDNESS OF MR. HORACE SHIELDS

BY

Margaret Deland

The Unexpectedness of Mr. Horace Shields[1]

Margaret Deland

I

DR. WILLIAM KING had married his wife because of her excellent common-sense.

It was an evidence of his own common-sense that he was not moved by mere prettiness, or sweetness, or whatever. Mrs. William was, as it chanced, good-looking; but Willy said that was the last thing he had thought of; he said she was a sensible woman, with no whims. She would keep his house; and his ledger, for that matter; and bring up his children; and see that his buttons were sewed on—and not bother him. Willy had seen bothering wives. His profession brought him in constant contact with them—nervous, sentimental, hysterical, nagging, egotistical wives. The doctor used to say he wondered how men had the courage to get married at all, considering; and he was convinced that this state of things was the result of marrying for sentiment; he had married for sense.

"Sentiment," said Dr. King, "is a phase of youth and growth; we've got to go through with it; but to make a phase permanent is the act of a fool."

"Well, now, William," objected Dr. Lavendar, "look at Oscar. You can't say it's a phase of youth?"

[1] From *Old Chester Tales.* Copyright, 1898, by Harper & Brothers.

"Oh, Oscar caught it late," the doctor said. "I have had a case of measles where the patient was sixty-two. As for Dorothea, she's young enough to be foolish; Martha says she looks under the bed every night for a man! She says she doesn't even buy her own clothes. Imagine me deciding on Martha's shoestrings! Well, Martha wouldn't have it. Nobody would resent that sort of thing more than Martha," said Willy, complacently.

Martha managed her own shoestrings in those first days; and by-and-by, such was her common-sense, she managed the doctor's also. Though Willy did not talk so much about it when that time came.

Still, he must have appreciated the way in which she expended his small income; for she fed and clothed her plump, blond William as though he had twice as much to live on. When Mrs. King made an unusually good bargain with the meat-man, or haggled with Mr. Horace Shields until he sold her a bottle of ink for two cents less than the general public paid, she used to say, exultingly, that it was well for Willy, considering that he would not send bills to half of his patients, that he had a wife who would look after things.

"I don't know what would have become of you, Willy, if you'd married a different kind of woman," Martha would say, good-naturedly. "You would have been in the poor-house by this time!"

Although she did not know it, the good Martha really opened up a very interesting question which most women would do well to ask themselves in regard to their husbands: What would my Tom, or Dick, or Harry, have been without *me?* Not so silent, if he had chosen a girl who did not gush; not so selfish, if he had had a wife less addicted to unselfishness; not so ill-tempered, if he had married some one less anxious and nagging. The fact is,

these simple men creatures are as wax in our hands; our tempers and our tongues decide their eternal salvation—though they never know it. They all mean pretty well in the beginning, but they fall into the hands of their wives, and look at the result!

But Martha King had no time to waste in such speculations. She was secretary of the Woman's Auxiliary; and it was known in Old Chester that she had once sent a letter to the *Spirit of Missions* calling attention to the mistakes of this admirable organization. She had a Sunday-school class; and she did all the cutting out for the Sewing Society. She was an indefatigable parish worker; "invaluable in practical matters," Dr. Lavendar said, heartily. What he said when she took it upon herself to tell him that he had done wrong not to give Anna King back to her own mother nobody knew except Martha, and she never told; but her face got red when the matter was referred to at Sewing Society. Still, I remember in this connection that when Mr. Jim Shields expressed his opinion of Mrs. King to Dr. Lavendar, the old minister smoothed him down, and bade him remember that Martha had a good heart. "Good, but not graceful," Mr. Jim growled. And Dr. Lavendar chuckled.

Added to her moral excellences, Mrs. King was a remarkable housekeeper; her economies were the admiration of Old Chester;—economical housekeeping was not an Old Chester characteristic; we were too near Mason and Dixon's line for that. She was orderly to a mathematical degree, and so immaculately neat that she had been known to say that if she should see a particle of dust behind a picture-frame at twelve o'clock at night, she would rise from her bed and remove it! The reply made to this declaration was: "If you could see a particle of dust behind a picture-frame at twelve o'clock at

night, you had better rise; — and consult an oculist at once."

Any woman will know that the doctor said this: it is the reply of a husband.

But, really and truly, Mrs. King was a capable, conscientious, sensible woman; and Old Chester was not unreasonable in expecting the same characteristics in her younger sister, Lucy; but their only resemblance was that they neither of them had the slightest sense of humor. In every other way they could not have been more radically different if they had been relations by marriage.

Perhaps this was because they were almost strangers, Lucy having lived in the East with her father ever since she was ten years old. He came back, poor old man, at last, to die in Mercer. And a month afterward Old Chester was told briefly that Mrs. King's sister, Lucy, was coming to live with her.

"I don't believe in it," Mrs. King said. "Willy's sister didn't come to live with him when poor old Mrs. King died; and I don't know why my sister should live with me. But Willy will have it. I only hope, for her own self-respect, Lucy will find something to do, so that she won't be a burden on him. I shall tell her so, flatly and frankly. I consider it my duty."

So Lucy came, with "Dick," her canary-bird, and her little caba full of worsted-work. She was only twenty-three, the idol of the old father, whose relation to her had been maternal and loverlike and brotherly, all at once. One does not just see why, for though she was a good girl, she was not especially attractive; very shy, not pretty exactly, though she had soft deer's eyes; certainly not sensible; crushed, poor child, when she came to live with the Kings, by her father's loss.

Willy looked at her once or twice the first day at

breakfast, and wondered how two sisters could be so different.

"No, I don't like sewing," she said, listlessly. "No, I don't care for books." And then, later: "No, I don't know anything about cooking. I don't like housekeeping. But I like worsted-work pretty well."

"I think," said Martha, decidedly, "that father did very wrong not to let you learn to do something useful. Worsted-work is nothing but a waste of time. I think he—"

"Don't!" the other cried out. "Don't speak to me about my father!"

"Well, he was my father too," Mrs. King remonstrated. "One speaks the truth of people, Lucy, whether they are relations or not. Because he was my father doesn't make him perfect," said Martha, gravely.

But Lucy got up and went out of the room, trembling as she walked.

"You hurt her feelings," said the doctor.

"But, my dear, it's true. She ought to have been taught things; but father spoiled her from the time she was born. She was the youngest, you know; and he just lay down and let her walk over him. Which was wrong; you can't deny that?"

"I want my dinner at 1.30," said Willy King. "I've got to see Mr. Jim Shields again, and I want to go before dinner."

"You went before breakfast," said Mrs. King. "There's nothing you can do; and as you make no charge, it seems rather foolish—"

"Do you think your sister would like to go round with me in the sleigh this morning?" the doctor said, stopping, with his hand on the door-knob, and looking back into the dining-room. "It isn't cold, and the sleighing is good."

But Lucy, when her sister took the message up to her, only said, listlessly, "I don't mind."

"It will do you good," her brother-in-law called upstairs; "come along!"

And Martha added, kindly, "Here's a cushion, Lucy, to put behind you."

"I don't need it, thank you, sister Martha," Lucy said.

"Oh, you will be much more comfortable," Mrs. King said, decidedly; and pushed the pillow behind her little sister, and tucked the robe firmly around her feet; and then they started—the quiet, apathetic, unhappy child (who had removed the cushion as soon as she was out of her sister's sight), leaning back in the sleigh behind the doctor's big shoulder, and looking off over the snow shining under a soft blue sky, but saying nothing. Once she uttered a little cry when the runner on the doctor's side went up on a drift and the sleigh heeled like a boat; and once she caught his arm, because the horse danced at the sound of the butcher's horn tooting at a customer's door.

"Scared?" said Willy, looking at her kindly. "You mustn't mind Jinny; she is a lamb. She only prances to show she feels happy."

"I'm so afraid of horses," Lucy answered, breathlessly.

After that her brother-in-law made Jinny walk down all the hills; then he told her which of his patients he was going to visit, and once or twice added interesting details of their diseases, which made Lucy turn away her head and wince, and say, under her breath, "Oh please, brother William! I can't bear to hear those things."

And the doctor whistled, and said to himself, "Sisters!"

That day the longest call was upon Mr. Jim Shields; it was so long that Willy came running out of the house after a while, bareheaded, and bade his sister-in-law get

out of the sleigh and go into the shop in the basement to wait for him.

"I hope you don't mind, Lucy," he said; "I just meant to look in on him; but he is having a dreadful—" Lucy drew up one shoulder and bit her lip. "He doesn't feel very well; so I must wait awhile. You go right into the shop; there's nobody there; Mr. Horace is up-stairs with his brother."

He helped her out, and hurried back into the house, where, in his anxiety and pity, he forgot Lucy, sitting alone in the little shop down-stairs.

There was a fire in the triangular grate in the corner, and the sunshine came in through the window in the door, behind which a little bell had tinkled as they entered. "Books, Etc. H. Shields," was the sign outside; but, to be exact, Mr. Horace's shop was mostly "Etc." Lucy, looking about, saw that the slates on the third shelf were not in an orderly pile; she glanced nervously around, and then slipped behind the counter and straightened them; then she dusted the books in the small show-case with her handkerchief, and blew the powdered chalk from the shelf where the blackboard materials were kept. Just then the bell struck out a jangling note, and the door opened; a boy wanted two envelopes. Lucy looked at him in consternation; but when the child pointed to the green pasteboard box where the stationery was kept, and even opened the till for her so that she might change his dime, she found herself quite at ease; she even hoped some more customers would come, it was so interesting to sell things. But no one came, and Lucy watched the square of sunshine move across the floor, and heard a cinder drop sometimes from the grate, or a spurt of flame bubble out between the bars. It was an hour before her brother-in-law thought of her, and came, with many apologies, to take her home.

He had quite forgotten Lucy. Like everybody else in Old Chester, the doctor's mind was full of the Twins—Old Chester always referred to the Shield brothers in this way. Being twins, the two old gentlemen were, for all practical purposes, the same age; but, as far back as I can remember, the younger had been "Old Mr. Horace" to his neighbors, while the first-born was Jim Shields to the end of the chapter —and a brave end it was too! In his early manhood he had been a high-hearted, irresponsible, generous young fool; a bit of a bully, very likely, in the way of overriding other people's views, and insisting upon his own with a joyous dogmatism that never irritated. And in middle life, when what he called his "cussed body" got the better of him and pinned him down into a wheeled chair, he was still generous, and courageous, and merry; and he bullied his brother and his doctor and Old Chester, and indeed Death himself—bullied him, jeered at him, swore at him, and lived through nearly thirty years of dying without a wince.

James had fallen ill when he was thirty-five. He was sailing around the world as supercargo for a large East India trading-house; when, suddenly, he came home. He had "had notice," he said, briefly. "An old sawbones in London explained it to me," he said, "told me I mustn't try to keep going any longer. Fact is, I've got to rust;—or bust," he ended, cheerfully.

It was a year before Old Chester knew that that "rusting" meant an invalid's chair, and slow, relentless, invincible dying; but James and Horace knew it, and they looked into the enemy's eyes together. Horace was a little man, with a rosy face; he was resolute, but it was in his own fashion; he had his quiet way of carrying out plans for Jim's comfort, no matter how his twin roared at him, and swore he would or he wouldn't; but he never

had his brother's vigor in expressing himself. Indeed, once only, when, trembling with alarm, he called Willy King a fool, was he known to have spoken forcibly.

The two brothers lived in a brick house on Main Street; two flights of stone steps, their hand-rails ending in brass knobs, curved up to its front door, which had a fan-light and a big iron knocker. Behind this door was the hall, the walls covered with varnished paper which represented blocks of veined and mottled yellow marble; the staircase wound round this hall, and under it were two steel engravings—"The Maid of Saragossa" and "Bolton Abbey"—both brown and stained with mildew. The parlor was on the left as one entered; it was a big, bare room, with a high ceiling; there were green Venetian blinds in the windows, and a pale paper on the walls—landscapes in light brown, of castles and lakes; on the wooden mantel, like flat trees laden with prisms, were three candelabra, each with its ormolu milkmaid simpering under the boughs; and there were some shells, and a carved teakwood junk, and a whale's tooth—relics of Mr. Jim's adventurous days. Here, all day long, Jim Shields sat and watched life slip between his helpless fingers. Death seemed to play with him as a child plays with a fly—pulling off a wing, or a leg, or another wing, and the head last.

But nothing goes on forever. James had been dying for nearly thirty years, and one day he died.

"But," Horace had gasped when, that sunny December morning, while little Lucy was waiting in the shop, Willy King told him how it was going to be—"but it's so sudden!" And then he remembered that, after all, Willy was but a boy. What did he know about James? James was taken sick when Willy was fifteen years old. "You're a fool, Willy!" he said, trembling. "I'm going to send to Mercer for a man; this isn't a time for boys!" "I wish

you would, sir," Willy said, earnestly; "and why don't you have Wilder from Upper Chester? He's first-rate."

Afterward, as he drove Lucy home, the doctor said that if it was the slightest comfort to Mr. Horace, he wished he would call in all the doctors in the township. "Not that there is a single thing to do," said Willy, slapping his rein down on Jinny's shining flank; "Mr. Jim has come to the end. And poor old Mr. Horace will break his heart."

His little sister-in-law looked over at the runner cutting into unbroken snow at the edge of the road. "I'm sorry," she said, in a low voice.

II

Little Lucy was sorry, but her sorrow did not keep her from shrinking away up-stairs when Martha began to ask the doctor the particulars of the morning: "Another spasm at twelve? Well, I suppose his feet have begun to swell? I hope he won't last much longer, poor man. I felt just so about father; I didn't want him to linger, and—" but just here Lucy slipped out of the room, and her sister looked after her open-mouthed. As for the doctor, he plodded industriously through his very good dinner, and told her every detail; and when he had finished the dinner and the disease, he added, absently "She is very sensitive, isn't she?"

"Who?" said Martha.

"Why, your sister."

"Oh, Lucy? She is very silly, I'm afraid. I don't believe in calling foolishness sensitiveness! And you told old Mr. Horace?"

"Yes, I told him, poor old fellow!"

"Well, he ought to be glad to have Mr. Jim free from

suffering," the doctor's wife said, kindly. "I should have told him so, flatly and frankly. What did he say?"

"He said I was a fool," Willy answered, smiling. "He's going to have further advice."

"I hope he has the money to pay for it," Martha said; "he won't find that all doctors are like you, Willy. One would think, to look at some of your bills, that you were independently rich, instead of just a poor country doctor. And now here's Lucy come to be a burden on you—"

"She isn't a burden at all," William King said. "She doesn't eat enough to keep a sparrow alive, and I guess even Mr. Horace's account will provide for that." Then he looked out of the window. "It isn't as if we had children of our own we had to save for," he said.

Mrs. King was silent.

As for Willy, he went back and spent the afternoon with the twins. The end was very near; for the "man" that Mr. Horace had sent for confirmed the "boy"; and by-and-by Jim confirmed them both.

"I can't help it, Horry," the dying man said, moving his big, lionlike, gray head restlessly—"I've—got to—let go."

Mr. Horace set his jaws together and drew a determined breath. "Of course you have—of course you have. Now don't worry. I'll get along. Come now, cheer up!"

"But you'll be so damned lonely," whimpered the other. He was blind, and could not see his little brother wipe his eyes, and blink, and swallow to get his voice steady.

"Well, yes, of course; somewhat. But I can get along first-rate; and I'll get more time for reading."

"Reading!" said the other, with a snort. "Much reading you'll do! No, you'll be—just damned lonely," he said again, with a groan.

"Don't think of it," said Mr. Horace, his voice trembling. "I—I won't mind it in the least, my dear fellow. Oh,

James!" he ended, weakly. He looked up at Willy King, but the doctor was making a pretence of dropping some medicine into a glass, so as to hide his own blurring eyes. As for Dr. Lavendar, who was there too, he took the groping, dying hand, and said,

"Jim, we'll all stand by him—" and then he took out his big red silk handkerchief, and his breath caught in a sob. For, like everybody else, he loved Jim Shields. To be sure, he winced at certain words which honest old Mr. Jim used with surprising freedom; but apparently he never took them much to heart. "Jim—Jim, don't be profane," he would remonstrate, with a horrified look. And Jim, sweating with pain, would gasp out:

"The devil take it! I forgot the cloth. I apologize, but I wasn't profane. Profanity is unnecessary swearing; and if this isn't necessary, I'll be—"

"James! James! James!" . . . .

But now when Jim Shields lay dying, his wicked tongue, his impudent courage were an expression of his religion; and the old minister had eyes to see this. So he only patted the blind, groping hand, and said:

"Jim, we'll do all we can for Horace. Never you fear!"

"Who's afraid?" said Mr. Jim, thickly. "But I—can't hold on—much—longer. Damned if I can."

"Don't try—don't try," Horace entreated, in anguish. Then came a long, dull effort, and the heavy, muffled tongue said one pathetic word,

"Lonely?"

"No," old Mr. Horace said again—"no; I won't be lonely. Mind now, Jim, I won't be lonely. Do you hear? Jim, I won't. Jim—*do you hear?*"

So, bravely, old Horace Shields told his lie to make dying less deadly for his brother.

Then he went on living as well as he could, meeting first the visible loneliness, if one may call it so—the silent house, the empty chair, the fuller purse. The occupation of service was ended; the anxiety was over; the habits of life were torn to pieces. Ah, me! How much of the torment of grief comes from this violent change of the habits of life! For Mr. Horace there were no more duties: he need not roll a wheeled chair on the sunny side of the street; he need not taste the beef-tea to see if it had enough pepper; he need not bring out the chess-board; he need not do a hundred other small services; his habit of affection was over, and the habit of grief had not yet come to him. He went blundering and staggering through the overwhelming leisure of material loneliness. As for the spiritual loneliness—but enough of that! Those of us who have reached middle life do not need the telling; and the younger folk would not understand it if they were told. They are dancing to the piping of Life, and one of these days they'll pay the piper; then they will understand.

But everybody was very good to poor old Mr. Horace in his affliction. Mrs. Dale sent him wine jelly in a rabbit mould. Mrs. Drayton presented him with a "booklet" bound in white and gold, and named *Tears Wiped Away;* but she sighed a little when she wrapped it up, and said to Mrs. Wright that poor James Shields's language was not that to fit a man for dying; however, she *hoped* the Lord would overlook it: in fact, she had asked Him to do so. Miss Wellwood—she was just then about to become Mrs. Barkley, so it was especially kind in her to think of other people's sorrows—carried him a handful of ambrosia, which, having been first dipped in water, and then rolled in flour, formed a white and shaking decoration, suitable, Miss Maria thought, for a house of mourning.

Dr. Lavendar used to come and sit with him in the

evening, and smoke silently; noticing, as silently, that Jim's chair and footstool had not been removed, and that the chess-board had remained just as it had been left at the last game—that pathetic effort of grief to find permanence. Sam Wright sent Mr. Horace a case of wine; Willy King was very attentive; and Martha wrote him a kind, sensible letter, telling him that if he would remember that Mr. Jim was at rest he would be reconciled, she was sure. And then she added that she had heard that he would not have Mr. Jim's room changed, but that she did hope he would not make such a mistake. "It is easier to change things now than it will be later," she said, very truly, "so I do hope you will just have the parlor renovated. Take my word, it will be easier for you in the end."

Mr. Horace, when he had read this very good advice, poked her letter down into the fire, and then looked around the room, fiercely, as though challenging what everybody will agree was common-sense.

A good many letters of sympathy came, but Mr. Horace did not read them. He put them away in his desk in the shop. Nor did his kindly, sorry old friends venture to talk about James. "He can't bear that, it appears," Dr. Lavendar said, sadly, and smoked in pitying silence.

It was all silence to Mr. Horace—a silence without interest. He went into the store every morning, and looked listlessly about; there was the mail to be opened—when there was any mail, and occasional customers to be waited on. There was the trade paper to be read, and sometimes circulars. Jim used to make the circulars into spills to light his pipe, because, he said, everything ought to be of some use in the world, even lies. But the interest of the shop, the story of the day's doings to be told to Jim, was gone. After supper there was nothing for it but to sit

alone in the parlor, with the faded landscapes on the wall, and the twinkle of lamplight in the prisms of the candelabra, and the chess-board open on the table. Nothing for it but to sit there and think of James with every muscle of the body and the soul held back from its customed movement of service and of care—so tense and so weary that when sleep relaxed his vigilance for a moment these faithful servants of years of affection moved automatically, and he would put his hand on the chess-board, or wake with a start, calling out: "James! What is it? James—"

III

"I tried to tell old Mr. Horace how I sympathize with him," said Mrs. King, "and he just said, 'Oh yes; yes, yes. Do you think we are going to have rain?' Some one ought to tell him, flatly and frankly, to try and accustom himself to speak of Mr. Jim; it would be a great deal better for him."

Lucy was silent, sitting with her hands in her lap, looking out of the window into the rainy garden. Her worsted-work had been given up soon after she came to live with her sister, for Martha had pointed out to her that it was very foolish to make things nobody needed; "the Jay girls do enough of that," said Mrs. King, with a good-natured laugh. So Lucy's hands were idle, and her sister made an impatient gesture. "How can you sit there, Lucy, and do nothing?"

"I'm going to read," Lucy said.

"What is your book?" her sister inquired, kindly; and Lucy displayed a paper-cover, which made Martha shake her head and smile and sigh.

"A novel! Lucy, don't you do *any* improving reading?"

"I don't like improving reading," Lucy said, nervously.

Martha put her work down. "Now, Lucy, look here; I don't believe you mean what you say, but if you do mean it you ought to be ashamed to say it."

"I'll sew, if you want me to," said Lucy, turning white and red.

"I don't want you to sew for me," the doctor's wife said. "I can do my own work. But I must say I don't see how you can be willing to be idle. You do nothing but take care of that poor canary-bird—(the most untidy thing I ever had in my house!) Upon my word, Lucy, if I had a dozen daughters, I'd bring every one of them up to do something, so they shouldn't be dependent!"

"I'd like to do something," Lucy answered, faintly, "but I don't know anything."

"Well, that's just what I say," her sister said. "But I suppose there's no use talking!" Yet, after the manner of ladies who say there is no use talking, the doctor's wife continued to talk. She had talked pretty much all winter. Little Lucy had shrunk and shivered, and gone up-stairs to cry all by herself, but nothing had come of it. She was so silent and apathetic, so incapable of repartee, that it must be said in excuse for Martha, that she had no conception how her words stung. Apparently they made no impression whatever; which lured her on into greater and greater frankness—that virtue in whose name so many unpleasantnesses are committed! Once the doctor said, nervously, he did wish she would let up on that child; and his wife, a little hurt, said that she was only speaking for Lucy's good. "If I had ten girls of my own," she said, "I would bring them up to have proper ideas of work."

"I think ten girls with proper ideas would be dreadful to live with," said the doctor, conjugally. And then he went up-stairs and knocked on Lucy's door, and produced a little package.

"A present—for me?" Lucy said, and pulled open the parcel, and found a little pin lying on a bed of pink cotton.

"Oh, brother William!" she said, and gave him her hand; and then, on an impulse, put up her face and kissed him.

As for Willy King, he blushed to his ears. Then she bade him wait while she put the pin into the black ribbon bow at her throat. "Does it look pretty?" she said, anxiously. The doctor put his head on one side, and said that it did.

Lucy looked in the glass, and took the pin out and stuck it in at a different angle. "Isn't that better?" she said; and Willy turned round to the light, and said, critically, he believed it was.

He went down-stairs smiling to himself. "I gave Lucy a pin," he told his wife. "She was as pleased as a little kitten."

"A pin!" said Martha. "Why, Willy King! as if you didn't have expense enough in buying her shoes and stockings! And I must say, considering how hard it is to make both ends meet, it was extravagant, my dear."

"It was only five dollars," her husband defended himself.

"Wilson's bill for fixing the drain is five dollars," Mrs. King observed, significantly. "Justice before generosity, my dear."

William King made no reply, but he knew she was right; which did not make him any more affectionate. For men love their wives not because of their virtues, but in spite of them.

As for Martha, she was really troubled. "We can't afford to make presents," she said to herself; she was putting a new binding on her dress, and her fingers were dusty, and her mind in the ruffled condition peculiar to

this occupation. When Lucy came and showed her the little pin, it took real grace on poor Martha's part not to express her opinion.

Instead, she glanced at her over her glasses, and said, kindly: "You look a little pale, Lucy. If you feel chilly you had better take some quinine."

"I hurt my ankle when I went out to walk," Lucy explained, her sister's interest rousing her a little. "I tripped on the board-walk on the common; it had a hole in it."

"That's very dangerous—I mean the hole," Martha said; "your ankle will be all right as soon as you have rested it. Put your foot up on a chair."

"I don't think I want to," Lucy said.

"Oh, you'll be a great deal more comfortable!" Martha said, with kindly decision; and got up herself, and brought a chair and a pillow, and lifted the strained ankle gently. "There, that's better!" she said. Lucy sighed. "But about the hole in the board-walk: some one might hurt themselves seriously. You had better write a note to Sam Wright about it; he is the burgess, you know."

"Oh, I couldn't!" Lucy said, horrified.

Martha put her work down and looked at her. "Lucy, have you *no* sense of responsibility? Don't you care to make things better?"

"I wouldn't write to him for anything in the world!" said Lucy.

Martha shook her head. "That's not the way to look at life, Lucy. But I'm afraid it's part of your nature. I'm afraid it's the same characteristic which makes you willing to be idle when all the rest of the world is at work."

And Lucy, turning white and red, said not a single word.

Mrs. King sighed and went on with her binding; arguing with Lucy was like trying to sew with no knot in your

thread. Martha was seriously troubled about her sister; not so much at the girl's absolute inefficiency as at the lack in character which it indicated. All winter she had been trying, honestly and prayerfully, to correct it, with about as much success as one who tries with big, well-meaning, human fingers to smooth out a butterfly's crumpled wing, or to free some silken, shining petal which has caught and twisted in its imprisoning calyx.

Well, well! if good people would only be content to know that the rest of us cannot reach their level, how much irritation they would spare themselves!—and we, too, in little ways, would be happier. Though that, of course, does not matter.

The fact was, poor Lucy's virtues were not economic or civic; they were, perhaps, nothing more than a little kindly heart, pure thoughts, and a pretty, eager smile; but they were her own. Martha conscientiously tried to bestow hers upon the child; and Lucy grew more and more silent.

"I make absolutely no impression!" poor Martha said, sighing; and Willy replied, under his breath, "Thank Heaven!"

However, she did make an impression at last.

It was at night, and Martha, going up to bed, saw a light under Lucy's door. "How foolish of her to sit up so late!" she thought—for it was late. Martha had waited up to see that the doctor had something hot to eat and drink when he came in at midnight from a late call (thus was Willy justified of common-sense in a wife). And here was Lucy's lamp burning at nearly one.

Martha, in a warm and ugly gray flannel dressing-gown, knocked at the door, and entered, her candle in her hand, and her work-basket under one arm. "Why, you're rather late, aren't you, Lucy?" she said, disapprovingly.

Lucy was sitting over a little fire which had retreated into one corner of the grate; she shivered as she looked up. "I'm just going to bed," she said.

"It's foolish to sit up when you don't have to," Martha said, decidedly.

"I got worried about brother William," Lucy confessed; "I wanted to make sure he was at home—there's such a storm to-night."

"Worried!" cried her sister, laughing in spite of herself. "Why, he's at home, safe and sound, eating some supper down-stairs. My dear, worry is the most foolish thing in the world. I never worry. Now do go to bed. Here, I'll slake your fire for you."

She took up the poker, stirring the discouraged-looking fire vigorously; then she lifted the coal-scuttle in her strong hands and flung the slake on; there was a small burst of flame, and the smell of coal-dust and gas.

"Oh, it's so unpleasant!" said Lucy, drawing back.

"There are a great many unpleasant things in this world, Lucy," said Martha, shortly. "Come, now, go to bed! It isn't as if you had any duty which kept you up."

"Yes; I will," Lucy said, listlessly.

"Dear me, Lucy, I don't know what you would do if you had any duties. I sometimes think it's fortunate for you that your brother-in-law is so good-natured. Most men, especially if they were poor country doctors like Willy, would rather resent it to have to support their wives' sisters, who haven't a single care or duty in the world except to look after a canary-bird. (I don't see how you can keep that bird, it's so untidy!)"

"I don't know what to do," Lucy said, getting up and looking at her with frightened eyes—"and—and—I'll try not to eat so much, sister Martha."

Martha winced at that. "Oh, don't be foolish, my

dear! It isn't the eating, or anything like that. It's the *principle:* I would earn my way. But don't be foolish and talk about not eating!" Mrs. King had the sensation of having stepped down further than she expected—a sort of moral jar.

"I would do anything I could," said little Lucy, beginning suddenly to cry convulsively. "I don't like to be a burden on brother William; but I never learned to do anything, and—"

"Yes, that's just what I said; father never had you taught anything. You might give music lessons, if he had ever made you practise thoroughly; but he was just satisfied to have you play tunes to him after supper. I don't blame you, but I do blame father. I—"

"Stop blaming father! Oh, my father! my father!"

Lucy ran, panting, to the other side of the room, and caught up a little photograph of her father and held it against her breast.

Martha looked at her in consternation and serious disapproval. "How can you be so foolish, Lucy?" she said. "Well, there's no use talking; only, I must say, flatly and frankly—"

"Martha, I won't hear my father criticised. I wish I was dead with him. Oh, father!" the poor child broke out. And then there was a fit of crying, and she threw herself on the bed, face down, and would not speak when her sister tried to comfort her.

"There, now, come!" Mrs. King said; and patted her shoulder, which showed no yielding;—there is nothing which can be so obstinate as the shoulder of a crying woman.

Mrs. King was really uneasy when she left her. She even went so far as to tell the doctor that she thought he had better look after Lucy.

"I think she's inclined to be hysterical," she said. "She is a foolish girl, I'm afraid, but I think she's really nervous too. What do you suppose, Willy? She was sitting up over a miserable little fire, *worrying*, if you please, because you were late! I have no patience with women who worry. Either the thing will happen, or it won't; and sitting up in the cold, until one o'clock in the morning, won't accomplish anything one way or the other."

"Worrying? about me!" said the doctor, stopping with a suspender in one outstretched hand; "well!"

IV

But the worm had turned. In her hopeless, uninterested way, Lucy had made up her mind: she would not be a burden any longer. She would go to Mercer and try to get pupils, and give music lessons. She was not resentful, she was not bitter, still less was she in intelligent accord with her sister; she was only started, so to speak, like a stone that has been pushed past a certain point of resistance.

A week after this talk she told Martha that she was going to Mercer. "I am going to visit Miss Sarah Murray; she invited me to visit her some time this winter. And I'll take Dick."

Mrs. King put down her sewing. "I shouldn't think you would want to make visits, Lucy, with father dead only six months. I should think you would rather stay quietly here with me, considering that we are both in affliction."

Lucy made no reply.

"But of course you are perfectly free to do as you please," her sister went on.

"I think I'd better go," Lucy said.

There was something in her voice that made Mrs. King

uneasy. "I don't see why you say that; of course, if you want to go—why, go! But I must say it looks as though you were not contented, and it sort of reflects on your brother-in-law."

"Oh! no, no!" Lucy said, in an agitated way; "he has been so kind to me!"

Somehow, Martha King winced at that, though she did not know why.

The doctor, when he heard the news, frowned; and then he half sighed. "Oh, well, she's young," he said.

But he chucked his little sister-in-law under the chin when he came down to breakfast, and told her that if she stayed away too long he would come and bring her home. "And look here, Lucy, you must have a new cape or bonnet or something. What do you say to a pink bonnet?"

Willy smiled all over his face, but his jaw fell when Martha said, "Now, Willy! how can she wear pink when she is in black?"

"Oh—oh yes," the doctor said, awkwardly. And then, for no reason in particular, he sighed;—perhaps the child would be happier in Mercer. "Well," he said, "you can have an escort, if you go on Wednesday, Lucy;—Mr. Horace Shields. I'll ask him to look after you. He's going East to give his spring order."

"So I heard at Sewing Society," Martha said. "Well, I think he is a very foolish old man."

Mrs. King was not alone in this belief. Old Chester was greatly disturbed by this project of Mr. Horace's; he had always ordered his goods by mail, and to take a journey for the purpose was obviously unnecessary.

"I don't like restlessness," said Mrs. Dale, with a stern look.

"Sam sent him some wine," said Mrs. Wright, "and I

am sure we were all very kind to him; so why should he go away from home?"

"Besides," said Mrs. Drayton, "who can make up to him for his loss so well as his friends? We all liked poor Mr. James—though he did certainly use improper language at times. I once heard him use a profane word myself. I should not be willing to repeat it. It was—not the worst one, but the one with 'r' in it, you know."

The ladies shook their heads, except Mrs. Barkley, who said, harshly, that, for her part, she didn't wonder at Jim Shields; she believed she would have said something stronger than "dear me" herself. But Martha King said, seriously, that she hoped Mrs. Drayton had told him, flatly and frankly, how wrong it was to lose one's self-control and swear.

"Well, no, I didn't," Mrs. Drayton confessed. "It's so painful to me to speak severely to any one."

"Because it is painful is no reason for not doing one's duty," Martha returned, decidedly.

"Well, as for his going away," said Mrs. Drayton, "probably he hasn't been so overwhelmed by grief as we thought. I judged him by myself. If *I* had lost a loved one, I couldn't go travelling about. But I'm sure I hope he'll enjoy himself, poor man!"

And all the Sewing Society said it was sure it hoped so, too.

It was a rainy morning in March that Mr. Horace went away. The stage was waiting for him at the door of the tavern when he came hurrying down the street—he had been delayed by giving directions to Mrs. Todd, who was to keep the shop open during his absence—and there was the doctor holding an umbrella over a slim girl in a black frock, who was carrying a bird-cage in one nervous little hand.

"This is Lucy, Mr. Horace," Willy King said. "We will be so much obliged if you will look after her on the way."

"To be sure I will — to be sure I will," said Mr. Horace; and the little girl put her hand in his without a word.

She was the only other passenger; and when Willy had tucked the robe around her, and smuggled a bag of candy into her muff, the door, with its painted landscape, was slammed to, and the stage, pitching and creaking on its springs, started up the hill, passing the church and then the graveyard—at which Mr. Horace looked through the streaming rain on the coach window. His fellow-traveller, however, turned her face away.

There was something in the shrinking movement that touched Mr. Horace. He remembered that Willy had told him the child had had some sorrow—if one can say sorrow in connection with youth; so he made an effort to come out of his absorption, and talk to her, and cheer her.

She had very little to say, only answering him in gentle monosyllables, until by some chance he referred to her father.

"I met him several years ago, ma'am; and my brother James had some acquaintance with him."

Lucy's eyes suddenly filled.

Mr. Horace looked at her, with instant sympathy in his ruddy old face. So youth may grieve, after all?

"My dear, I have recently suffered a loss myself," he said, gently.

"Oh yes," said Lucy; "I know. I was very sorry, sir."

"Ah—well," said Mr. Horace, with a sigh—"he was sick a long time. I ought not to begrudge him his release.

Yes, he had been an invalid for many years. But he was the bravest of the brave. My brother was a sailor in his youth. He had many interesting adventures. He has told me stories of his adventures by the hour. But when he came to be an invalid, after such an active life, he never flinched. The bravest of the brave!"

"My father was brave," said Lucy.

"My brother had been in most foreign lands," Mr. Horace went on. "He was shipwrecked twice before he was thirty. I recollect, as well as if it was yesterday, how he came home after that first time he was wrecked. We had given him up. My mother was up-stairs cutting out those little—ah, garments that children wear. She was cutting out a pair to go in a missionary barrel. Well, James just walked into the room, as casually as if he hadn't been out of the house. My mother (I recollect perfectly) she threw up her hands — she had the scissors on her thumb and finger — and she said, 'Why, James, where on earth did you come from?' And my brother he said: 'From the waters under the earth; from India's coral strands,' he said. (You know the hymn?) 'But I haven't any coral or any clothes—except what you see,' he said. 'I hope you'll give me those things'; meaning the—the small garment; and he stood six feet two!"

Lucy smiled vaguely.

"It was a joke," Mr. Horace explained.

"Oh yes, I see. My father was a good deal like that, saying funny things. They're pleasant to live with, such people."

"They are, indeed—they are, indeed," Mr. Horace agreed, sighing. "My brother's humor was invincible, perfectly invincible. Why, I recollect perfectly—"

The story he remembered was not brilliant humor, but Lucy was as polite as if it were, and capped it with some-

thing her father had said; and then Mr. Horace followed quickly with another "I remember." Perhaps they neither of them really heard what the other said, but they found infinite relief in speaking. Why Mr. Horace could not have "recollected perfectly" to Dr. Lavendar, or why little Lucy could not have talked, if not to her sister, at least to her kindly brother-in-law, is one of those inexplicable things that belong to grief. It was easier for each because the other was a stranger.

When the stage pulled into Mercer, the wheels tired in mud, and the apron over the trunks streaming with rain, the two travellers were talking very freely. Indeed, Lucy had gone so far as to say that she was going to give music lessons.

"I'm going to visit Miss Sarah Murray first. When I get some pupils, I'll board somewhere," she added, vaguely.

"My brother Jim knew the Misses Murray," said Mr. Horace. "I have heard him remark that Miss Sarah, the eldest, was a very genteel and accomplished female. My brother Jim expressed it more as a sailor might," Mr. Horace amended, with a smile, "but his words were to that effect." And when he helped his fellow-passenger and the canary-bird out of the stage he said, with pleasant, old-fashioned politeness, that if the Misses Murray were agreeable, he would call the next day and pay his respects to them and to Miss Lucy.

"I'd like you to come, sir," Lucy said. "I'd like to show you a letter our minister wrote about father."

And Mr. Horace remembered that he had some letters, too. It came into his mind that perhaps some day he would read them; perhaps he would show some of them to this young lady, who, he was sure, would have admired Jim. "Jim was a great favorite with the ladies," he thought to himself, sighing and smiling.

V

"I recollect, just as if it were yesterday, when my brother James brought home from one of his voyages a little savage —a heathen, in fact. My mother was exceedingly alarmed about his spiritual state; but Woolly (that was what my brother James called him) was converted immediately. My brother said it was because my mother gave him a cake whenever he named our Saviour. And I sometimes feared there was truth in this remark."

Lucy laughed, and Mr. Horace looked pleased, and patted her hand kindly. Miss Sarah and Miss Emily Murray, who were sitting on either side of the fire, smiled, and Miss Sarah observed that missionaries often used such methods as food and glass beads to attract poor savages.

"My brother said that just before he landed he suddenly realized that Woolly had to have clothes; you know, being a savage and a heathen, he had no garments of any kind. In fact, he was—ah—if I may say so—quite—quite, as you may say, undressed. My brother knew that, such being the case, Woolly would be conspicuous when the ship came into port and the poor savage landed at the wharf. So what did my brother James do but make Woolly lie down, with his arms extended, on a piece of cloth spread on the deck; then he took a lump of chalk and outlined him, as it were; then he doubled the cloth and cut this out like those paper dolls which are made for infants out of newspapers; and he sewed Woolly into these two pieces. Dear me! I wish you could have seen him! How my mother did laugh! 'I wouldn't give a fig for your sewing, James,' says she. 'But my sewing gives a fig-leaf to Woolly,' says my brother. James had such a ready tongue."

"The suit must have fitted very badly," Lucy said, seriously.

"Yes," Mr. Horace admitted, "but it was warm, you know; and—ah—customary."

"Oh yes, of course," said Lucy.

It was with tales like this that old Horace Shields tried to cheer his little companion when he came to see her at the Misses Murrays'. He had decided not to continue his journey East to purchase stock, but order by mail from Mercer, where, he thought, he would remain for a few days and see if he could not comfort this poor child who seemed, somehow, to be on his hands. But he stayed nearly three weeks. He came to call almost every day, and the estimable Misses Murray welcomed him warmly, and told him that they were much grieved at the depression of their young friend. "And indeed," said kind old Miss Sarah, "I fear I must add that I do not approve of the apparent indifference dear Lucy displays toward her sister. Lucy says that Martha does not like her canary-bird;—which is really a foolish reason for wishing to reside in Mercer. It almost looks like temper. I think, however, your conversation cheers her, and when she is less depressed she may come to a more proper mind in regard to her family."

Mr. Horace certainly did cheer the nervous, worried girl; and sometimes his own burden seemed lightened in his effort to lighten hers. In telling her his stories about his brother, he led her to talk about her father, and then about her own affairs; and the third time he called, when they chanced to be alone, she told him, palpitating and determined, that she would "never, never, *never* go back and live with her sister, because she would not be a burden on brother Willy."

"But, my dear young lady," he remonstrated, "you cannot live alone here in Mercer, you know."

"Oh yes," said poor little Lucy, "I know. But I won't go back to sister Martha."

"But what will you do, my dear Miss Lucy?" Mr. Horace said, anxiously.

"Oh, I don't know!" cried poor Lucy, and her big deer-like eyes had a hunted look in them that went to the old gentleman's heart. He made a point of seeing the Misses Murray by themselves, and they all talked the matter over with anxious seriousness.

"It is impossible for her to get pupils," Miss Sarah said; "she is not the sort of young woman who can push and make her own way."

"I am not sure that she is not more pleasing on that account," Miss Emily said, with decision.

Mr. Horace nodded his head, and said his brother James had always disliked excessively capable ladies. "My brother James said he wouldn't want to sit down at table three times a day with a horse-marine," he said, chuckling; "not but what he had great respect for intelligence," he added, politely.

And the Misses Murray said, oh yes, indeed; they quite understood. And then they begged Mr. Horace, who was returning to Old Chester in a few days, to correspond with them on the subject, so that they might advise the child wisely.

Mr. Horace promised to do so; and during the tiresome stage journey home he put his mind upon Lucy's troubles. He wondered what Jim would say about it all. Jim had his opinion of Mrs. Willy; Mr. Horace chuckled as he thought of it. "Estimable woman," said Mr. Horace to himself, "very estimable; but not agreeable. Poor Miss Lucy!"

He thought of her with an impulsive pity which brought out the youth of his ruddy old face—that fine youth of the spirit which cannot be touched by the body's age.

Her grief for her father was but a child's grief, he thought, a half-smile on his lips; it was not the iron entering into the soul, but it was pathetic. He thought how she had shown him some letters of condolence that had been sent her, and that made him think, suddenly, of the letters that had come to him. It occurred to him, with a warm feeling of satisfaction, that when he got home he would unlock the drawer in the shop and take out that pile of letters, and perhaps he might send one or two to Miss Lucy. He thought of them eagerly as he walked up from the tavern to his own door; they were like a welcome waiting for him in the desolate old house.

Old Chester was full of tranquil evening light. Behind the low, dark line of the hills the daffodil sky was brightening into gold; there had been a shower in the afternoon, and the damp air was sweet with the smell of young grass and buds. There were little pools of water shining in hollows of the worn flagstone pavement; and the brass stair-rails and knobs of the comfortable old brick houses glittered, suddenly, all the way down Main Street. Mr. Horace found himself smiling as he walked; then he stopped with a start because Martha King spoke to him; she called from the other side of the street, and then came hurrying across.

"I'm glad to see you back, Mr. Horace," she said, and asked one or two questions about Lucy and the Misses Murray. "We've missed the shop, Mr. Horace," she ended, in a decided voice. There are persons whose hawk-like virtue seems always ready to swoop down upon you, and Mr. Horace began to cower a little, like a flurried partridge. "I am sorry to say," the good Martha continued, "that Mrs. Todd has been remiss about keeping the shop open. I do hope you will speak to her about it, flatly and frankly. I think it is a duty we owe each other

not to slight wrong-doing in servants. She has not kept regular hours at all," Mrs. King said, "and it has been a great annoyance. Won't you come in and take tea with us, Mr. Horace?"

"No, ma'am, I thank you," he said, and hurried into his house. "Poor Miss Lucy!" he said to himself; "poor Miss Lucy!"

She was in his thoughts when, sitting all alone in the shop, with his lamp on the desk beside him, he took out the letters which had been put away all these months. After all, these old friends loved James. "And well they might!" he told himself, proudly. He opened one letter after another, and read the friendly, appreciative words, nodding and sighing, and saying to himself: "Yes, indeed! Yes, he was brave; he was patient. Who knows that as well as I do?" The comfort of it came warmly to his heart, and the applause braced and cheered him until, for very happiness and pride, two little hot tears trickled down his cheeks and splashed on the pile of letters.

But when he went up-stairs into the silent house, into the dreadful emptiness of that room where James had lived for nearly thirty years—the old despair of desolation seized him again. It was that which, by-and-by, made him say he would go back to Mercer for a few days, and see what the Misses Murray had done for Miss Lucy. He wanted to get away from the house—anywhere! He thought to himself that he would take the letters to read to Miss Lucy; she had been so interested in Jim that she ought to know that his praise had not been merely brotherly regard. "And I am really anxious to know what the poor young lady is going to do," he said to himself, when, to the astonishment of Old Chester, he again took the stage for Mercer.

"Twice in two months!" said Old Chester; but Mrs.

Todd, who, in spite of Mrs. King's warning, was again to keep the shop open for his few days of absence, said it was a real good thing, and would do the poor old gentleman good.

VI

Little Lucy had not secured a single pupil during the weeks she had been in Mercer. She was well aware she could not prolong her visit to the kind Misses Murray indefinitely, but what was she going to do? Poor child! how many times a day did she ask herself this question! The very afternoon of Mr. Horace's return she had gone out and walked hopelessly about until dusk in Mercer's dirty, busy streets, to think it over. The wind whirled up the street and caught her black skirts in a twist, and flung the dust into her face and into her eyes. The lights began to twinkle along the bridge that spanned the river, and then wavered down into its black depths in golden zigzags. Against the sullen sky the furnaces flared with great tongues of flame and showers of sparks. The evening traffic of the town, noisy, dirty, hideous; the hurrying crowds in the streets; the rumble of the teams; the jostling of workmen—all gave her a sense of her utter helplessness, so that the tears began to start, and she had to wipe them away furtively. What was going to become of her? The child, walking alone in the spring dust, looked down at the river, and thought that the water was very black and very cold. I don't suppose she formulated any purpose in her own mind; she only thought, shivering, "The water is very cold."

Mr. Horace met her there on the bridge, and there was something about her that made the old gentleman's heart come up in his throat. He took her hand and put it through his arm, and said, cheerfully, "Come

with me, my dear Miss Lucy, and let us walk home together."

As for Lucy, she only said, feebly, "*I won't go back to sister Martha.*"

"You sha'n't, my dear," said Mr. Horace, comfortingly, "you sha'n't, indeed."

That evening he talked the situation over with Miss Sarah Murray; but she only shook her head and said she hoped the child would soon look at the matter more reasonably. "I would gladly keep her here indefinitely," Miss Sarah said, in a troubled way, "but our income is exceedingly limited—"

"Oh, certainly not, certainly not," Mr. Horace broke in. He had come to feel responsible for Lucy, somehow; he could not have her dependent upon Miss Murray.

He got up and said good-night with a very correct bow, his feet in the first position for dancing, his left hand under his coat-tails.

Old Miss Sarah responded in kind, and they parted with high opinions of each other.

But Mr. Horace had not reached the street corner before he heard, "Mr. Shields! Mr. Shields!" and there was Lucy running after him, bareheaded.

"I've thought of something," she said, breathlessly, as she stood beside him, panting under the gas-lamp on the corner. "Can't I come and take care of the shop, Mr. Shields? Can't I live with you and take care of the shop?"

Mr. Horace, in his eagerness to hurry her back to the house, hardly knew what he answered: "Yes, yes, my dear young lady. Anything that you wish. Come now, come! you must get in-doors. What will Miss Murray say?"

"I am to come and live with you?" Lucy insisted, her eyes wide and frightened. "You won't make me go back to sister Martha?"

"No, my dear; no, no!" he said. It seemed to Mr. Horace as though Miss Sarah was an hour in answering his agitated knock and opening the door. "Miss Lucy just stepped out to speak to me," he said, in reply to her astonished look.

"Oh, Miss Sarah, I am going to live with Mr. Shields!" said Lucy.

Mr. Shields came very early the next morning to Miss Murray's house, and was received in the parlor by Miss Sarah. Lucy was not present. Miss Sarah sat in a straight-backed chair, with her delicate old hands crossed in her lap. There was some color in her cheek, and a determined look behind her spectacles.

"I trust," said Mr. Horace, "that Miss Lucy is none the worse for stepping out last night, ma'am? I was much concerned about her when I left her."

"She is none the worse in body; but I am deeply grieved at her attitude of mind," said Miss Sarah.

"You mean her unwillingness to live with her sister?" said Mr. Horace, anxiously.

Old Miss Sarah shook her head. "She is quite determined not to return to her relatives."

"You don't say so!"

"She needs to be taken care of just as much as if she were a baby," said Miss Sarah. "But of course this plan of hers in regard to—to residing with you, is impossible. Even if it were not a question of burdening you (she has an idea that she would earn her board, if I may so express it), it would be impossible. I have pointed this out to her."

"And what does she say?" demanded Mr. Horace.

"She merely weeps," Miss Sarah said; "she has given it up at my request, of course; but she weeps, and says she will not go back to Martha."

Mr. Horace hunted for his handkerchief, and blew his nose violently. "Dear, dear!" he said, "you don't say so? Well, well! I wish my brother James were here. He would know what to propose. Poor child! poor child!"

Mr. Horace got up and stared out of the window; then he blew his nose again.

Miss Sarah looked at the back of his head, but was silent. Suddenly he turned, and came and stood beside her.

"Miss Murray, you are a female of advanced years and of every proper sentiment; all I have seen of you leads me to feel a deep esteem for you." Miss Sarah bowed. "Therefore I ask you, *is* it impossible? I could give the child a good home while I live. I have recently lost my brother, ma'am, and the little income devoted to his use could be transferred to Miss Lucy. I find myself much attached to her, and would be pleased to have her in my home. It would be less lonely for me," he said, his voice tremulous; "and my age, ma'am, is sixty-five. Surely it is not impossible?"

Miss Sarah, who was nearly eighty, grew red, but she was firm. "My dear sir, you are still young"—Mr. Horace blinked suddenly, and sat up straight—"our friend is twenty-three, and her looks are pleasing. Need I add that this is a wicked world? I have lived much longer than you, sir, and I am aware that it is both wicked and censorious. Can you say that Old Chester is exempt from gossip, Mr. Shields?"

"No, ma'am, I can't," he admitted, with an unhappy look.

"You see it is impossible," Miss Sarah ended, kindly.

Mr. Horace sighed.

Miss Murray looked at him and coughed; then she drew in her breath as one who prepares to strike. "If you

were sufficiently advanced in years, my dear sir, so that—matrimony was out of the question, it would be different." Mr. Horace gasped. "But under the circumstances," continued Miss Sarah, sighing, "I see nothing before our young friend (since she is determined not to return to her sister) but to work in some factory." Miss Murray's house was in the old-fashioned part of Mercer, and there was a factory just across the street; she waved her hand toward it, genteelly, as she spoke.

The room was quite still except for a coal dropping from the grate. Mr. Horace heard a footstep overhead, and knew it was Lucy walking restlessly about in her pitiful, unreasoning misery. Involuntarily he followed Miss Murray's gesture, and glanced across the street. Two draggled-looking girls were just entering the bleak doorway opposite. "Little Miss Lucy do that? No!—impossible!"

"I am sixty-five; I shall not, probably, live very much longer," he thought. "Suppose it were five years, even; she would still be a young woman."

Poor little girl! poor little frightened, helpless child! "And I would be less lonely," he said to himself, suddenly. "Jim would call me an old fool, but it would please him to have me less lonely." Mr. Horace drew a long breath.

"Miss Murray," he said, "would I be taking advantage of our friend's youth and inexperience if I—if I—if I suggested—matrimony?"

Miss Sarah did not seem startled; indeed, she even smiled.

"I think," she said, "it would be an admirable arrangement."

Mr. Horace looked at her; she looked at him. Then they began to talk in whispers, like two conspirators. "But would she—" began Mr. Horace.

"I'm sure of it!"

"But she is so young—"

"She will outlive you."

"I would not wish to take advantage—"

"You are only doing a kindness."

"Her relatives—"

"Her relatives have driven her to it!" cried Miss Sarah. Which was really rather hard on Martha and on Lucy's kind and affectionate brother-in-law.

"Well, we'll protect her," said Horace, angrily. And then he suddenly looked blank, and said: "Would you—ah—be willing to—to suggest it to her? I feel a sense of embarrassment."

"That is quite unnecessary," Miss Murray declared; "for you are doing a great favor, and if I know Lucy, her gratitude will not be lacking. But I will gladly tell her of your kindness."

"Oh, pray don't say gratitude," Mr. Horace protested, growing red; "don't say kindness. Let her regard it as a favor to me, which it is. I assure you it is."

Miss Murray rose, smiling; and Mr. Horace went away with a new and extraordinary sensation. There was something in his thoughts that came between him and his grief; a sense of excitement, of chivalry, of hope—even of hope! He found himself making plans as he walked along the street; he saw Lucy in his mind's eye at his lonely supper-table; he fancied her sitting beside him in the dreadful evenings listening to his stories of Jim—it seemed to Mr. Horace as though his fund of anecdotes of Mr. James was inexhaustible; he imagined her reading Jim's books, and laughing in her light, girlish voice as Jim used to laugh in his rollicking bass. His heart grew warm and light in his breast as he walked and thought; and then suddenly it sank: perhaps she would not consent.

VII

But Lucy consented—eagerly, feverishly. "Oh, Miss Sarah, how kind he is!" she said.

"Very true, Lucy, very true," said Miss Sarah, solemnly. "I hope you will always remember it. Very few gentlemen, Lucy, of Mr. Shields's age would think of such a thing. I hope you will realize that to ask a young, inexperienced, foolish (yes, Lucy, I fear I must say foolish) girl to—ah—to bear his name, is indeed a compliment."

"I will take care of the shop," said Lucy, her eyes beginning to shine, and the droop of face and figure fading as she spoke. "Oh, he is so kind! And I will never go *near* Martha!"

"Fy, fy! my dear," said Miss Sarah; "a little reflection will show you that such a remark is neither ladylike nor pious."

Mr. Horace came for his answer at two o'clock; he had settled down into feeling quite sure that it was impossible, and that he and Miss Sarah must think of something else, and when Lucy met him, smiling and half crying, and saying, "You are so kind to me, Mr. Shields; and indeed, indeed I will do all I can to deserve it," he was almost dazed with astonishment. He protested that she would be doing him a great favor.

"I am so much older, my dear," he said.

But Lucy broke in, smiling, "You are good to me, just as father was."

"I will be good to you, my dear; I will indeed, to the best of my ability," he said, earnestly.

He smiled at her and patted her hand; and then he said, "I will communicate with your relatives, my dear Miss Lucy."

"Oh no," Lucy said, shrinking, "don't tell them!"

But Miss Murray shook her head. "Mr. Shields must, of course, refer to your family for permission."

Lucy looked frightened. "Martha won't allow it," she said, faintly. "Oh, don't tell Martha!"

"My dear, I could not allow you to elope," Miss Sarah remonstrated.

And Mr. Shields said, "No, no, that wouldn't do!"

Then the two elders talked it over, Lucy listening and shivering, and saying sometimes, "Oh, Martha will say I'll be a burden to you, Mr. Shields."

"I am prepared," Mr. Horace said to Miss Murray, "to have them say I am far too old; and even that I am taking advantage of our young friend. But I am sustained," said Mr. Horace, "by the knowledge of the integrity of my motives. Miss Lucy is of age, and if she chooses my home it is not the affair of William's wife, or even of William, for whom I have a sincere regard. But I am inclined to think, ma'am, that it will perhaps be wise to—to bring this matter to a head—if I may so express it, before they have a chance to interfere. I will communicate with William and his wife; but before they can remonstrate we will take steps, we will take steps! What do you think of that, ma'am?"

"Admirable!" said Miss Murray. "Admirable!"

"However," said Mr. Horace, blinking his eyes suddenly, as though something cold had been thrown in his face, "it will be very unexpected in Old Chester!"

It was unexpected. Old Chester, too, gasped and blinked as though it had a cold douch.

Willy King was angry; but Martha, very sensibly, said that it was foolish to be angry. "But I am mortified," she said, "and I don't understand it."

Old Chester, when it heard the news, nearly went out of its mind with agitation and disapproval—"and sorrow," Mrs. Drayton said, "that the dead were soon forgotten!" Mrs. Dale said that Mr. Horace had taken advantage of that poor, poor child's youth. Mrs. Wright, on the contrary, felt that it was really disgusting to see a girl so mercenary as to marry an old man for a home. Mrs. Ezra Barkley said, gently, that he had been so lonely, poor Mr. Horace! no doubt he just couldn't stand the desolation of his life.

"But that doesn't explain the other fool," her sister-in-law interrupted, with a snort.

"Do you know what Dr. Lavendar said when he heard it?" Rose Knight asked, suddenly. "He said, 'Hooray for Horace!'"

"Dr. Lavendar is getting very old," said Mrs. Dale, sternly.

After the first excitement of it was over, it came to Martha King's ears that Lucy had married to escape living with her. (Those things always leak out; some friend, with a frankness as conscientious probably as Martha's own, "thought Lucy's sister should be told.")

When poor Martha heard why Lucy had committed this extraordinary folly, she turned white, smitten into silence. "I tried to do my duty," she said, painfully, and made no reproaches. But she suffered. "I did everything I could for her best good," she said to herself, as she sat alone working; then she wiped her eyes furtively on the unbleached cotton shirt she was hemming for the missionary barrel. "Lucy doesn't love me," she thought, sadly; "nobody does but William. But I've always tried to do my duty." Once, blunderingly, looking down at her fingers trembling in her lap, she said something like this to Dr. Lavendar.

"Martha, my dear," he said, gravely, "*love more, and do*

less. Do you remember Isaiah (and he was a pretty energetic old fellow, too) says, 'Their strength is to sit still'? Our Heavenly Father is just as anxious to improve things as we are; but if you'll notice, He lets us make our blunders and learn our lesson. And He works by love oftener than by the thunders of Sinai. But come, come! We all love you, and Lucy will know that she does, too, one of these days."

But how happily it did turn out! Mr. Horace lived more than the five years he had allowed himself; and no wonder, with the affection his little girl gave him, and the need there was to take care of her, and keep her happy; a man really can't die, no matter how good his intentions are, when he is needed. And, besides that, Lucy's eager, child-like sympathy was like some pure and healing touch. Gradually he took up old interests, and liked to meet old friends. His grief for his brother passed down through the ruined habits of living into the depths of life, and after a while settled into a habit of its own. Then the old interests closed in upon him—just as a ruffled pool smooths and closes over the crash that has shattered its even silver; though all the while the weight is buried in its heart.

It was a sunny, placid, happy old house in those days, though nobody could say it was sensible. Dick's cage hung in a south window, and the little yellow creature splashed about in his china bath, and scattered millet seeds, and shouted his little songs all day long. Lucy used to come and sit in the shop while she shelled the peas for dinner, or did her bit of worsted-work. And she kept things dusted; perhaps not quite as Martha would have done; the backs of the pictures may have left something to be desired. But so long as nobody knew it, what difference did it make? This lack of principle must make the

conscientious grieve; but Lucy and old Mr. Horace were just as happy as though their principles were good. They talked a great deal of Mr. Jim. In the evenings they sat up-stairs in the big, bare parlor—a little less bare now, because Lucy made gay worsted covers for all the chairs; and Mr. Horace tried to teach her how to play chess. To be sure, the fool's or scholar's mate might end the game every night, but it gave him a chance to tell her of Jim's prowess. He gave her Jim's books to read, and though she did not know enough to laugh at the right places in Mr. Jim's beloved *Shandy*, she felt a breathless interest in *The Three Musketeers;* and old Mr. Horace annotated it with Jim's comments.

They used to read over those letters of sympathy, too, which suggested so many stories of the big, generous, rollicking old man who had died young, that little by little, as Mr. Horace told this, or remembered that, or laughed at the other, James came back into his life. But there was never any misery in the thought of him; only acceptance, and patience, and an understanding which mere death could never shake or break. James was dead; but what was death between him and James?

So they went on being happy. And on winter evenings, or when the summer dusk shut down, and Lucy sat playing foolish tunes on a little old jingling piano, it was surprising how often a certain admirer of common-sense came poking in to smoke with Mr. Horace, and listen to Lucy's chatter, or maybe take a hand at cribbage.

In fact, Martha King said that never since they had been married had William had so many night-calls.

IV

THE ADVENTURE OF THE SPECKLED BAND

BY

A. Conan Doyle

The Adventure of the Speckled Band[1]

A. Conan Doyle

IN glancing over my notes of the seventy-odd cases in which I have during the last eight years studied the methods of my friend Sherlock Holmes, I find many tragic, some comic, a large number merely strange, but none commonplace; for, working as he did rather for the love of his art than for the acquirement of wealth, he refused to associate himself with any investigation which did not tend toward the unusual, and even the fantastic. Of all these varied cases, however, I cannot recall any which presented more singular features than that which was associated with the well-known Surrey family of the Roylotts of Stoke Moran. The events in question occurred in the early days of my association with Holmes, when we were sharing rooms as bachelors in Baker Street. It is possible that I might have placed them upon record before, but a promise of secrecy was made at the time, from which I have only been freed during the last month by the untimely death of the lady to whom the pledge was given. It is perhaps as well that the facts should now come to light, for I have reasons to know that there are wide-spread rumors as to the death of Dr. Grimesby Roylott which tend to make the matter even more terrible than the truth.

It was early in April in the year '83 that I woke one

[1] From *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes.* Copyright, 1892, by Harper & Brothers.

morning to find Sherlock Holmes standing, fully dressed, by the side of my bed. He was a late riser as a rule, and as the clock on the mantel-piece showed me that it was only a quarter past seven, I blinked up at him in some surprise, and perhaps just a little resentment, for I was myself regular in my habits.

"Very sorry to knock you up, Watson," said he, "but it's the common lot this morning. Mrs. Hudson has been knocked up, she retorted upon me, and I on you."

"What is it, then—a fire?"

"No; a client. It seems that a young lady has arrived in a considerable state of excitement, who insists upon seeing me. She is waiting now in the sitting-room. Now, when young ladies wander about the metropolis at this hour of the morning, and knock sleepy people up out of their beds, I presume that it is something very pressing which they have to communicate. Should it prove to be an interesting case, you would, I am sure, wish to follow it from the outset. I thought, at any rate, that I should call you and give you the chance."

"My dear fellow, I would not miss it for anything."

I had no keener pleasure than in following Holmes in his professional investigations, and in admiring the rapid deductions, as swift as intuitions, and yet always founded on a logical basis, with which he unravelled the problems which were submitted to him. I rapidly threw on my clothes, and was ready in a few minutes to accompany my friend down to the sitting-room. A lady dressed in black and heavily veiled, who had been sitting in the window, rose as we entered.

"Good-morning, madam," said Holmes, cheerily. "My name is Sherlock Holmes. This is my intimate friend and associate, Dr. Watson, before whom you can speak as freely as before myself. Ha! I am glad to see that Mrs.

Hudson has had the good sense to light the fire. Pray draw up to it, and I shall order you a cup of hot coffee, for I observe that you are shivering."

"It is not cold which makes me shiver," said the woman, in a low voice, changing her seat as requested.

"What, then?"

"It is fear, Mr. Holmes. It is terror." She raised her veil as she spoke, and we could see that she was indeed in a pitiable state of agitation, her face all drawn and gray, with restless, frightened eyes, like those of some hunted animal. Her features and figure were those of a woman of thirty, but her hair was shot with premature gray, and her expression was weary and haggard. Sherlock Holmes ran her over with one of his quick, all-comprehensive glances.

"You must not fear," said he, soothingly, bending forward and patting her forearm. "We shall soon set matters right, I have no doubt. You have come in by train this morning, I see."

"You know me, then?"

"No, but I observe the second half of a return ticket in the palm of your left glove. You must have started early, and yet you had a good drive in a dog-cart, along heavy roads, before you reached the station."

The lady gave a violent start, and stared in bewilderment at my companion.

"There is no mystery, my dear madam," said he, smiling. "The left arm of your jacket is spattered with mud in no less than seven places. The marks are perfectly fresh. There is no vehicle save a dog-cart which throws up mud in that way, and then only when you sit on the left-hand side of the driver."

"Whatever your reasons may be, you are perfectly correct," said she. "I started from home before six, reached

Leatherhead at twenty past, and came in by the first train to Waterloo. Sir, I can stand this strain no longer; I shall go mad if it continues. I have no one to turn to—none, save only one, who cares for me, and he, poor fellow, can be of little aid. I have heard of you, Mr. Holmes; I have heard of you from Mrs. Farintosh, whom you helped in the hour of her sore need. It was from her that I had your address. Oh, sir, do you not think that you could help me, too, and at least throw a little light through the dense darkness which surrounds me? At present it is out of my power to reward you for your services, but in a month or six weeks I shall be married, with the control of my own income, and then at least you shall not find me ungrateful."

Holmes turned to his desk, and unlocking it, drew out a small case-book, which he consulted.

"Farintosh," said he. "Ah yes, I recall the case; it was concerned with an opal tiara. I think it was before your time, Watson. I can only say, madam, that I shall be happy to devote the same care to your case as I did to that of your friend. As to reward, my profession is its own reward; but you are at liberty to defray whatever expenses I may be put to, at the time which suits you best. And now I beg that you will lay before us everything that may help us in forming an opinion upon the matter."

"Alas!" replied our visitor, "the very horror of my situation lies in the fact that my fears are so vague, and my suspicions depend so entirely upon small points, which might seem trivial to another, that even he to whom of all others I have a right to look for help and advice looks upon all that I tell him about it as the fancies of a nervous woman. He does not say so, but I can read it from his soothing answers and averted eyes. But I have heard,

Mr. Holmes, that you can see deeply into the manifold wickedness of the human heart. You may advise me how to walk amid the dangers which encompass me."

"I am all attention, madam."

"My name is Helen Stoner, and I am living with my step-father, who is the last survivor of one of the oldest Saxon families in England, the Roylotts of Stoke Moran, on the western border of Surrey."

Holmes nodded his head. "The name is familiar to me," said he.

"The family was at one time among the richest in England, and the estates extended over the borders into Berkshire in the north and Hampshire in the west. In the last century, however, four successive heirs were of a dissolute and wasteful disposition, and the family ruin was eventually completed by a gambler in the days of the Regency. Nothing was left save a few acres of ground, and the two-hundred-year-old house, which is itself crushed under a heavy mortgage. The last squire dragged out his existence there, living the horrible life of an aristocratic pauper; but his only son, my step-father, seeing that he must adapt himself to the new conditions, obtained an advance from a relative, which enabled him to take a medical degree, and went out to Calcutta, where, by his professional skill and his force of character, he established a large practice. In a fit of anger, however, caused by some robberies which had been perpetrated in the house, he beat his native butler to death, and narrowly escaped a capital sentence. As it was, he suffered a long term of imprisonment, and afterward returned to England a morose and disappointed man.

"When Dr. Roylott was in India he married my mother, Mrs. Stoner, the young widow of Major-General Stoner, of the Bengal Artillery. My sister Julia and I were twins,

and we were only two years old at the time of my mother's remarriage. She had a considerable sum of money—not less than £1000 a year—and this she bequeathed to Dr. Roylott entirely while we resided with him, with a provision that a certain annual sum should be allowed to each of us in the event of our marriage. Shortly after our return to England my mother died—she was killed eight years ago in a railway accident near Crewe. Dr. Roylott then abandoned his attempts to establish himself in practice in London, and took us to live with him in the old ancestral house at Stoke Moran. The money which my mother had left was enough for all our wants, and there seemed to be no obstacle to our happiness.

"But a terrible change came over our step-father about this time. Instead of making friends and exchanging visits with our neighbors, who had at first been overjoyed to see a Roylott of Stoke Moran back in the old family seat, he shut himself up in his house, and seldom came out save to indulge in ferocious quarrels with whoever might cross his path. Violence of temper approaching to mania has been hereditary in the men of the family, and in my step-father's case it had, I believe, been intensified by his long residence in the tropics. A series of disgraceful brawls took place, two of which ended in the police-court, until at last he became the terror of the village, and the folks would fly at his approach, for he is a man of immense strength, and absolutely uncontrollable in his anger.

"Last week he hurled the local blacksmith over a parapet into a stream, and it was only by paying over all the money which I could gather together that I was able to avert another public exposure. He had no friends at all save the wandering gypsies, and he would give these vagabonds leave to encamp upon the few acres of bramble-covered land which represent the family estate, and would accept

in return the hospitality of their tents, wandering away with them sometimes for weeks on end. He has a passion also for Indian animals, which are sent over to him by a correspondent, and he has at this moment a cheetah and a baboon, which wander freely over his grounds, and are feared by the villagers almost as much as their master.

"You can imagine from what I say that my poor sister Julia and I had no great pleasure in our lives. No servant would stay with us, and for a long time we did all the work of the house. She was but thirty at the time of her death, and yet her hair had already begun to whiten, even as mine has."

"Your sister is dead, then?"

"She died just two years ago, and it is of her death that I wish to speak to you. You can understand that, living the life which I have described, we were little likely to see any one of our own age and position. We had, however, an aunt, my mother's maiden sister, Miss Honoria Westphail, who lives near Harrow, and we were occasionally allowed to pay short visits at this lady's house. Julia went there at Christmas two years ago, and met there a half-pay major of marines, to whom she became engaged. My step-father learned of the engagement when my sister returned, and offered no objection to the marriage; but within a fortnight of the day which had been fixed for the wedding, the terrible event occurred which has deprived me of my only companion."

Sherlock Holmes had been leaning back in his chair with his eyes closed and his head sunk in a cushion, but he half opened his lids now and glanced across at his visitor.

"Pray be precise as to details," said he.

"It is easy for me to be so, for every event of that dreadful time is seared into my memory. The manor-house is, as I have already said, very old, and only one wing is now

inhabited. The bedrooms in this wing are on the ground floor, the sitting-rooms being in the central block of the buildings. Of these bedrooms the first is Dr. Roylott's, the second my sister's, and the third my own. There is no communication between them, but they all open out into the same corridor. Do I make myself plain?"

"Perfectly so."

"The windows of the three rooms open out upon the lawn. That fatal night Dr. Roylott had gone to his room early, though we knew that he had not retired to rest, for my sister was troubled by the smell of the strong Indian cigars which it was his custom to smoke. She left her room, therefore, and came into mine, where she sat for some time, chatting about her approaching wedding. At eleven o'clock she rose to leave me, but she paused at the door and looked back.

"'Tell me, Helen,' said she, 'have you ever heard any one whistle in the dead of the night?'

"'Never,' said I.

"'I suppose that you could not possibly whistle, yourself, in your sleep?'

"'Certainly not. But why?'

"'Because during the last few nights I have always, about three in the morning, heard a low, clear whistle. I am a light sleeper, and it has awakened me. I cannot tell where it came from—perhaps from the next room, perhaps from the lawn. I thought that I would just ask you whether you had heard it.'

"'No, I have not. It must be those wretched gypsies in the plantation.'

"'Very likely. And yet if it were on the lawn, I wonder that you did not hear it also.'

"'Ah, but I sleep more heavily than you.'

"'Well, it is of no great consequence, at any rate.' She

smiled back at me, closed my door, and a few moments later I heard her key turn in the lock."

"Indeed," said Holmes. "Was it your custom always to lock yourselves in at night?"

"Always."

"And why?"

"I think that I mentioned to you that the doctor kept a cheetah and a baboon. We had no feeling of security unless our doors were locked."

"Quite so. Pray proceed with your statement."

"I could not sleep that night. A vague feeling of impending misfortune impressed me. My sister and I, you will recollect, were twins, and you know how subtle are the links which bind two souls which are so closely allied. It was a wild night. The wind was howling outside, and the rain was beating and splashing against the windows. Suddenly, amid all the hubbub of the gale, there burst forth the wild scream of a terrified woman. I knew that it was my sister's voice. I sprang from my bed, wrapped a shawl round me, and rushed into the corridor. As I opened my door I seemed to hear a low whistle, such as my sister described, and a few moments later a clanging sound, as if a mass of metal had fallen. As I ran down the passage my sister's door was unlocked, and revolved slowly upon its hinges. I stared at it horror-stricken, not knowing what was about to issue from it. By the light of the corridor-lamp I saw my sister appear at the opening, her face blanched with terror, her hands groping for help, her whole figure swaying to and fro like that of a drunkard. I ran to her and threw my arms round her, but at that moment her knees seemed to give way and she fell to the ground. She writhed as one who is in terrible pain, and her limbs were dreadfully convulsed. At first I thought that she had not recognized me, but as I

bent over her she suddenly shrieked out, in a voice which I shall never forget: 'Oh, my God! Helen! It was the band! The speckled band!' There was something else which she would fain have said, and she stabbed with her finger into the air in the direction of the doctor's room, but a fresh convulsion seized her and choked her words. I rushed out, calling loudly for my step-father, and I met him hastening from his room in his dressing-gown. When he reached my sister's side she was unconscious, and though he poured brandy down her throat and sent for medical aid from the village, all efforts were in vain, for she slowly sank and died without having recovered her consciousness. Such was the dreadful end of my beloved sister."

"One moment," said Holmes; "are you sure about this whistle and metallic sound? Could you swear to it?"

"That was what the county coroner asked me at the inquiry. It is my strong impression that I heard it, and yet, among the crash of the gale and the creaking of an old house, I may possibly have been deceived."

"Was your sister dressed?"

"No, she was in her night-dress. In her right hand was found the charred stump of a match, and in her left a match-box."

"Showing that she had struck a light and looked about her when the alarm took place. That is important. And what conclusions did the coroner come to?"

"He investigated the case with great care, for Dr. Roylott's conduct had long been notorious in the county, but he was unable to find any satisfactory cause of death. My evidence showed that the door had been fastened upon the inner side, and the windows were blocked by old-fashioned shutters with broad iron bars, which were secured every night. The walls were carefully sounded,

and were shown to be quite solid all round, and the flooring was also thoroughly examined, with the same result. The chimney is wide, but is barred up by four large staples. It is certain, therefore, that my sister was quite alone when she met her end. Besides, there were no marks of any violence upon her."

"How about poison?"

"The doctors examined her for it, but without success."

"What do you think that this unfortunate lady died of, then?"

"It is my belief that she died of pure fear and nervous shock, though what it was that frightened her I cannot imagine."

"Were there gypsies in the plantation at the time?"

"Yes, there are nearly always some there."

"Ah, and what did you gather from this allusion to a band—a speckled band?"

"Sometimes I have thought that it was merely the wild talk of delirium, sometimes that it may have referred to some band of people, perhaps to these very gypsies in the plantation. I do not know whether the spotted handkerchiefs which so many of them wear over their heads might have suggested the strange adjective which she used."

Holmes shook his head like a man who is far from being satisfied.

"These are very deep waters," said he; "pray go on with your narrative."

"Two years have passed since then, and my life has been until lately lonelier than ever. A month ago, however, a dear friend, whom I have known for many years, has done me the honor to ask my hand in marriage. His name is Armitage—Percy Armitage—the second son of Mr. Armitage, of Crane Water, near Reading. My stepfather has offered no opposition to the match, and we are

to be married in the course of the spring. Two days ago some repairs were started in the west wing of the building, and my bedroom wall has been pierced, so that I have had to move into the chamber in which my sister died, and to sleep in the very bed in which she slept. Imagine, then, my thrill of terror when last night, as I lay awake, thinking over her terrible fate, I suddenly heard in the silence of the night the low whistle which had been the herald of her own death. I sprang up and lit the lamp, but nothing was to be seen in the room. I was too shaken to go to bed again, however, so I dressed, and as soon as it was daylight I slipped down, got a dog-cart at the 'Crown Inn,' which is opposite, and drove to Leatherhead, from whence I have come on this morning with the one object of seeing you and asking your advice."

"You have done wisely," said my friend. "But have you told me all?"

"Yes, all."

"Miss Roylott, you have not. You are screening your step-father."

"Why, what do you mean?"

For answer Holmes pushed back the frill of black lace which fringed the hand that lay upon our visitor's knee. Five little livid spots, the marks of four fingers and a thumb, were printed upon the white wrist.

"You have been cruelly used," said Holmes.

The lady colored deeply and covered over her injured wrist. "He is a hard man," she said, "and perhaps he hardly knows his own strength."

There was a long silence, during which Holmes leaned his chin upon his hands and stared into the crackling fire.

"This is a very deep business," he said, at last. "There are a thousand details which I should desire to know before I decide upon our course of action. Yet we have not

a moment to lose. If we were to come to Stoke Moran to-day, would it be possible for us to see over these rooms without the knowledge of your step-father?"

"As it happens, he spoke of coming into town to-day upon some most important business. It is probable that he will be away all day, and that there would be nothing to disturb you. We have a housekeeper now, but she is old and foolish, and I could easily get her out of the way."

"Excellent. You are not averse to this trip, Watson?"

"By no means."

"Then we shall both come. What are you going to do yourself?"

"I have one or two things which I would wish to do now that I am in town. But I shall return by the twelve-o'clock train, so as to be there in time for your coming."

"And you may expect us early in the afternoon. I have myself some small business matters to attend to. Will you not wait and breakfast?"

"No, I must go. My heart is lightened already since I have confided my trouble to you. I shall look forward to seeing you again this afternoon." She dropped her thick black veil over her face and glided from the room.

"And what do you think of it all, Watson?" asked Sherlock Holmes, leaning back in his chair.

"It seems to me to be a most dark and sinister business."

"Dark enough and sinister enough."

"Yet if the lady is correct in saying that the flooring and walls are sound, and that the door, window, and chimney are impassable, then her sister must have been undoubtedly alone when she met her mysterious end."

"What becomes, then, of these nocturnal whistles, and what of the very peculiar words of the dying woman?"

"I cannot think."

"When you combine the ideas of whistles at night, the

presence of a band of gypsies who are on intimate terms with this old doctor, the fact that we have every reason to believe that the doctor has an interest in preventing his step-daughter's marriage, the dying allusion to a band, and, finally, the fact that Miss Helen Stoner heard a metallic clang, which might have been caused by one of those metal bars which secured the shutters falling back into its place, I think that there is good ground to think that the mystery may be cleared along those lines."

"But what, then, did the gypsies do?"

"I cannot imagine."

"I see many objections to any such theory."

"And so do I. It is precisely for that reason that we are going to Stoke Moran this day. I want to see whether the objections are fatal, or if they may be explained away. But what in the name of the devil!"

The ejaculation had been drawn from my companion by the fact that our door had been suddenly dashed open, and that a huge man had framed himself in the aperture. His costume was a peculiar mixture of the professional and of the agricultural, having a black top-hat, a long frock-coat, and a pair of high gaiters, with a hunting-crop swinging in his hand. So tall was he that his hat actually brushed the cross-bar of the doorway, and his breadth seemed to span it across from side to side. A large face, seared with a thousand wrinkles, burned yellow with the sun, and marked with every evil passion, was turned from one to the other of us, while his deep-set, bile-shot eyes, and his high, thin, fleshless nose, gave him somewhat the resemblance to a fierce old bird of prey.

"Which of you is Holmes?" asked this apparition.

"My name, sir; but you have the advantage of me," said my companion, quietly.

"I am Dr. Grimesby Roylott, of Stoke Moran."

"Indeed, doctor," said Holmes, blandly. "Pray take a seat."

"I will do nothing of the kind. My step-daughter has been here. I have traced her. What has she been saying to you?"

"It is a little cold for the time of the year," said Holmes.

"What has she been saying to you?" screamed the old man, furiously.

"But I have heard that the crocuses promise well," continued my companion, imperturbably.

"Ha! You put me off, do you?" said our new visitor, taking a step forward and shaking his hunting-crop. "I know you, you scoundrel! I have heard of you before. You are Holmes, the meddler."

My friend smiled.

"Holmes, the busybody!"

His smile broadened.

"Holmes, the Scotland-yard Jack-in-office!"

Holmes chuckled heartily. "Your conversation is most entertaining," said he. "When you go out close the door, for there is a decided draught."

"I will go when I have said my say. Don't you dare to meddle with my affairs. I know that Miss Stoner has been here. I traced her! I am a dangerous man to fall foul of! See here." He stepped swiftly forward, seized the poker, and bent it into a curve with his huge brown hands.

"See that you keep yourself out of my grip," he snarled; and hurling the twisted poker into the fireplace, he strode out of the room.

"He seems a very amiable person," said Holmes, laughing. "I am not quite so bulky, but if he had remained I might have shown him that my grip was not much more feeble than his own." As he spoke he picked up the steel poker, and with a sudden effort straightened it out again.

"Fancy his having the insolence to confound me with the official detective force! This incident gives zest to our investigation, however, and I only trust that our little friend will not suffer from her imprudence in allowing this brute to trace her. And now, Watson, we shall order breakfast, and afterward I shall walk down to Doctors' Commons, where I hope to get some data which may help us in this matter."

It was nearly one o'clock when Sherlock Holmes returned from his excursion. He held in his hand a sheet of blue paper, scrawled over with notes and figures.

"I have seen the will of the deceased wife," said he. "To determine its exact meaning I have been obliged to work out the present prices of the investments with which it is concerned. The total income, which at the time of the wife's death was little short of £1100, is now, through the fall in agricultural prices, not more than £750. Each daughter can claim an income of £250, in case of marriage. It is evident, therefore, that if both girls had married, this beauty would have had a mere pittance, while even one of them would cripple him to a very serious extent. My morning's work has not been wasted, since it has proved that he has the very strongest motives for standing in the way of anything of the sort. And now, Watson, this is too serious for dawdling, especially as the old man is aware that we are interesting ourselves in his affairs; so if you are ready, we shall call a cab and drive to Waterloo. I should be very much obliged if you would slip your revolver into your pocket. An Eley's No. 2 is an excellent argument with gentlemen who can twist steel pokers into knots. That and a tooth-brush are, I think, all that we need."

At Waterloo we were fortunate in catching a train for

Leatherhead, where we hired a trap at the station inn, and drove for four or five miles through the lovely Surrey lanes. It was a perfect day, with a bright sun and a few fleecy clouds in the heavens. The trees and wayside hedges were just throwing out their first green shoots, and the air was full of the pleasant smell of the moist earth. To me at least there was a strange contrast between the sweet promise of the spring and this sinister quest upon which we were engaged. My companion sat in front of the trap, his arms folded, his hat pulled down over his eyes, and his chin sunk upon his breast, buried in the deepest thought. Suddenly, however, he started, tapped me on the shoulder, and pointed over the meadows.

"Look there!" said he.

A heavily timbered park stretched up in a gentle slope, thickening into a grove at the highest point. From amid the branches there jutted out the gray gables and high roof-tree of a very old mansion.

"Stoke Moran?" said he.

"Yes, sir, that be the house of Dr. Grimesby Roylott," remarked the driver.

"There is some building going on there," said Holmes; "that is where we are going."

"There's the village," said the driver, pointing to a cluster of roofs some distance to the left; "but if you want to get to the house, you'll find it shorter to get over this stile, and so by the foot-path over the fields. There it is, where the lady is walking."

"And the lady, I fancy, is Miss Stoner," observed Holmes, shading his eyes. "Yes, I think we had better do as you suggest."

We got off, paid our fare, and the trap rattled back on its way to Leatherhead.

"I thought it as well," said Holmes, as we climbed the

stile, "that this fellow should think we had come here as architects or on some definite business. It may stop his gossip. Good-afternoon, Miss Stoner. You see that we have been as good as our word."

Our client of the morning had hurried forward to meet us with a face which spoke her joy. "I have been waiting so eagerly for you!" she cried, shaking hands with us warmly. "All has turned out splendidly. Dr. Roylott has gone to town, and it is unlikely that he will be back before evening."

"We have had the pleasure of making the doctor's acquaintance," said Holmes, and in a few words he sketched out what had occurred. Miss Stoner turned white to the lips as she listened.

"Good heavens!" she cried, "he has followed me, then."

"So it appears."

"He is so cunning that I never know when I am safe from him. What will he say when he returns?"

"He must guard himself, for he may find that there is some one more cunning than himself upon his track. You must lock yourself up from him to-night. If he is violent, we shall take you away to your aunt's at Harrow. Now, we must make the best use of our time, so kindly take us at once to the rooms which we are to examine."

The building was of gray, lichen-blotched stone, with a high central portion, and two curving wings, like the claws of a crab, thrown out on each side. In one of these wings the windows were broken, and blocked with wooden boards, while the roof was partly caved in, a picture of ruin. The central portion was in little better repair, but the right-hand block was comparatively modern, and the blinds in the windows, with the blue smoke curling up from the chimneys, showed that this was where the family resided. Some scaffolding had been erected against the

end wall, and the stone-work had been broken into, but there were no signs of any workmen at the moment of our visit. Holmes walked slowly up and down the ill-trimmed lawn, and examined with deep attention the outsides of the windows.

"This, I take it, belongs to the room in which you used to sleep, the centre one to your sister's, and the one next to the main building to Dr. Roylott's chamber?"

"Exactly so. But I am now sleeping in the middle one."

"Pending the alterations, as I understand. By-the-way, there does not seem to be any very pressing need for repairs at that end wall."

"There were none. I believe that it was an excuse to move me from my room."

"Ah! that is suggestive. Now, on the other side of this narrow wing runs the corridor from which these three rooms open. There are windows in it, of course?"

"Yes, but very small ones. Too narrow for any one to pass through."

"As you both locked your doors at night, your rooms were unapproachable from that side. Now, would you have the kindness to go into your room and bar your shutters."

Miss Stoner did so, and Holmes, after a careful examination through the open window, endeavored in every way to force the shutter open, but without success. There was no slit through which a knife could be passed to raise the bar. Then with his lens he tested the hinges, but they were of solid iron, built firmly into the massive masonry. "Hum!" said he, scratching his chin in some perplexity; "my theory certainly presents some difficulties. No one could pass these shutters if they were bolted. Well, we shall see if the inside throws any light upon the matter."

A small side door led into the whitewashed corridor from which the three bedrooms opened. Holmes refused to examine the third chamber, so we passed at once to the second, that in which Miss Stoner was now sleeping, and in which her sister had met with her fate. It was a homely little room, with a low ceiling and a gaping fireplace, after the fashion of old country-houses. A brown chest of drawers stood in one corner, a narrow white-counterpaned bed in another, and a dressing-table on the left-hand side of the window. These articles, with two small wicker-work chairs, made up all the furniture in the room, save for a square of Wilton carpet in the centre. The boards round and the panelling of the walls were of brown, worm-eaten oak, so old and discolored that it may have dated from the original building of the house. Holmes drew one of the chairs into a corner and sat silent, while his eyes travelled round and round and up and down, taking in every detail of the apartment.

"Where does that bell communicate with?" he asked, at last, pointing to a thick bell-rope which hung down beside the bed, the tassel actually lying upon the pillow.

"It goes to the housekeeper's room."

"It looks newer than the other things?"

"Yes, it was only put there a couple of years ago."

"Your sister asked for it, I suppose?"

"No, I never heard of her using it. We used always to get what we wanted for ourselves."

"Indeed, it seemed unnecessary to put so nice a bell-pull there. You will excuse me for a few minutes while I satisfy myself as to this floor." He threw himself down upon his face with his lens in his hand, and crawled swiftly backward and forward, examining minutely the cracks between the boards. Then he did the same with the wood-work with which the chamber was panelled. Finally he

walked over to the bed, and spent some time in staring at it, and in running his eye up and down the wall. Finally he took the bell-rope in his hand and gave it a brisk tug.

"Why, it's a dummy," said he.

"Won't it ring?"

"No, it is not even attached to a wire. This is very interesting. You can see now that it is fastened to a hook just above where the little opening for the ventilator is."

"How very absurd! I never noticed that before."

"Very strange!" muttered Holmes, pulling at the rope. "There are one or two very singular points about this room. For example, what a fool a builder must be to open a ventilator into another room, when, with the same trouble, he might have communicated with the outside air!"

"That is also quite modern," said the lady.

"Done about the same time as the bell-rope?" remarked Holmes.

"Yes, there were several little changes carried out about that time."

"They seem to have been of a most interesting character —dummy bell-ropes, and ventilators which do not ventilate. With your permission, Miss Stoner, we shall now carry our researches into the inner apartment."

Dr. Grimesby Roylott's chamber was larger than that of his step-daughter, but was as plainly furnished. A camp-bed, a small wooden shelf full of books, mostly of a technical character, an arm-chair beside the bed, a plain wooden chair against the wall, a round table, and a large iron safe were the principal things which met the eye. Holmes walked slowly round and examined each and all of them with the keenest interest.

"What's in here?" he asked, tapping the safe.

"My step-father's business papers."

"Oh! you have seen inside, then?"

"Only once, some years ago. I remember that it was full of papers."

"There isn't a cat in it, for example?"

"No. What a strange idea!"

"Well, look at this!" He took up a small saucer of milk which stood on the top of it.

"No; we don't keep a cat. But there is a cheetah and a baboon."

"Ah, yes, of course! Well, a cheetah is just a big cat, and yet a saucer of milk does not go very far in satisfying its wants, I dare say. There is one point which I should wish to determine." He squatted down in front of the wooden chair, and examined the seat of it with the greatest attention.

"Thank you. That is quite settled," said he, rising and putting his lens in his pocket. "Hello! Here is something interesting!"

The object which had caught his eye was a small dog-lash hung on one corner of the bed. The lash, however, was curled upon itself, and tied so as to make a loop of whip-cord.

"What do you make of that, Watson?"

"It's a common enough lash. But I don't know why it should be tied."

"That is not quite so common, is it? Ah, me! it's a wicked world, and when a clever man turns his brains to crime it is the worst of all. I think that I have seen enough now, Miss Stoner, and with your permission we shall walk out upon the lawn."

I had never seen my friend's face so grim or his brow so dark as it was when we turned from the scene of this investigation. We had walked several times up and down the lawn, neither Miss Stoner nor myself liking to

break in upon his thoughts before he roused himself from his reverie.

"It is very essential, Miss Stoner," said he, "that you should absolutely follow my advice in every respect."

"I shall most certainly do so."

"The matter is too serious for any hesitation. Your life may depend upon your compliance."

"I assure you that I am in your hands."

"In the first place, both my friend and I must spend the night in your room."

Both Miss Stoner and I gazed at him in astonishment.

"Yes, it must be so. Let me explain. I believe that that is the village inn over there?"

"Yes, that is the 'Crown.'"

"Very good. Your windows would be visible from there?"

"Certainly."

"You must confine yourself to your room, on pretence of a headache, when your step-father comes back. Then when you hear him retire for the night, you must open the shutters of your window, undo the hasp, put your lamp there as a signal to us, and then withdraw quietly with everything which you are likely to want into the room which you used to occupy. I have no doubt that, in spite of the repairs, you could manage there for one night."

"Oh yes, easily."

"The rest you will leave in our hands."

"But what will you do?"

"We shall spend the night in your room, and we shall investigate the cause of this noise which has disturbed you."

"I believe, Mr. Holmes, that you have already made up your mind," said Miss Stoner, laying her hand upon my companion's sleeve.

"Perhaps I have."

"Then, for pity's sake, tell me what was the cause of my sister's death."

"I should prefer to have clearer proofs before I speak."

"You can at least tell me whether my own thought is correct, and if she died from some sudden fright."

"No, I do not think so. I think that there was probably some more tangible cause. And now, Miss Stoner, we must leave you, for if Dr. Roylott returned and saw us, our journey would be in vain. Good-bye, and be brave, for if you will do what I have told you, you may rest assured that we shall soon drive away the dangers that threaten you."

Sherlock Holmes and I had no difficulty in engaging a bedroom and sitting-room at the "Crown Inn." They were on the upper floor, and from our window we could command a view of the avenue gate, and of the inhabited wing of Stoke Moran Manor-House. At dusk we saw Dr. Grimesby Roylott drive past, his huge form looming up beside the little figure of the lad who drove him. The boy had some slight difficulty in undoing the heavy iron gates, and we heard the hoarse roar of the doctor's voice, and saw the fury with which he shook his clinched fists at him. The trap drove on, and a few minutes later we saw a sudden light spring up among the trees as the lamp was lit in one of the sitting-rooms.

"Do you know, Watson," said Holmes, as we sat together in the gathering darkness, "I have really some scruples as to taking you to-night. There is a distinct element of danger."

"Can I be of assistance?"

"Your presence might be invaluable."

"Then I shall certainly come."

"It is very kind of you."

"You speak of danger. You have evidently seen more in these rooms than was visible to me."

"No, but I fancy that I may have deduced a little more. I imagine that you saw all that I did."

"I saw nothing remarkable save the bell-rope, and what purpose that could answer I confess is more than I can imagine."

"You saw the ventilator, too?"

"Yes, but I do not think that it is such a very unusual thing to have a small opening between two rooms. It was so small that a rat could hardly pass through."

"I knew that we should find a ventilator before ever we came to Stoke Moran."

"My dear Holmes!"

"Oh yes, I did. You remember in her statement she said that her sister could smell Dr. Roylott's cigar. Now, of course that suggested at once that there must be a communication between the two rooms. It could only be a small one, or it would have been remarked upon at the coroner's inquiry. I deduced a ventilator."

"But what harm can there be in that?"

"Well, there is at least a curious coincidence of dates. A ventilator is made, a cord is hung, and a lady who sleeps in the bed dies. Does not that strike you?"

"I cannot as yet see any connection."

"Did you observe anything very peculiar about that bed?"

"No."

"It was clamped to the floor. Did you ever see a bed fastened like that before?"

"I cannot say that I have."

"The lady could not move her bed. It must always be in the same relative position to the ventilator and to the rope—for so we may call it, since it was clearly never meant for a bell-pull."

"Holmes," I cried, "I seem to see dimly what you are hinting at! We are only just in time to prevent some subtle and horrible crime."

"Subtle enough and horrible enough. When a doctor does go wrong, he is the first of criminals. He has nerve and he has knowledge. Palmer and Pritchard were among the heads of their profession. This man strikes even deeper; but I think, Watson, that we shall be able to strike deeper still. But we shall have horrors enough before the night is over; for goodness' sake let us have a quiet pipe, and turn our minds for a few hours to something more cheerful."

About nine o'clock the light among the trees was extinguished, and all was dark in the direction of the Manor-House. Two hours passed slowly away, and then, suddenly, just at the stroke of eleven, a single bright light shone out in front of us.

"That is our signal," said Holmes, springing to his feet; "it comes from the middle window."

As we passed out he exchanged a few words with the landlord, explaining that we were going on a late visit to an acquaintance, and that it was possible that we might spend the night there. A moment later we were out on the dark road, a chill wind blowing in our faces, and one yellow light twinkling in front of us through the gloom to guide us on our sombre errand.

There was little difficulty in entering the grounds, for unrepaired breaches gaped in the old park wall. Making our way among the trees, we reached the lawn, crossed it, and were about to enter through the window, when out from a clump of laurel-bushes there darted what seemed to be a hideous and distorted child, who threw itself upon the grass with writhing limbs, and then ran swiftly across the lawn into the darkness.

"My God!" I whispered; "did you see it?"

Holmes was for the moment as startled as I. His hand closed like a vice upon my wrist in his agitation. Then he broke into a low laugh, and put his lips to my ear.

"It is a nice household," he murmured. "That is the baboon."

I had forgotten the strange pets which the doctor affected. There was a cheetah, too; perhaps we might find it upon our shoulders at any moment. I confess that I felt easier in my mind when, after following Holmes's example and slipping off my shoes, I found myself inside the bedroom. My companion noiselessly closed the shutters, moved the lamp onto the table, and cast his eyes round the room. All was as we had seen it in the daytime. Then creeping up to me and making a trumpet of his hand, he whispered into my ear again so gently that it was all that I could do to distinguish the words:

"The least sound would be fatal to our plans."

I nodded to show that I had heard.

"We must sit without light. He would see it through the ventilator."

I nodded again.

"Do not go asleep; your very life may depend upon it. Have your pistol ready in case we should need it. I will sit on the side of the bed, and you in that chair."

I took out my revolver and laid it on the corner of the table.

Holmes had brought up a long, thin cane, and this he placed upon the bed beside him. By it he laid the box of matches and the stump of a candle. Then he turned down the lamp, and we were left in darkness.

How shall I ever forget that dreadful vigil? I could not hear a sound, not even the drawing of a breath, and yet I knew that my companion sat open-eyed, within a few feet

of me, in the same state of nervous tension in which I was myself. The shutters cut off the least ray of light, and we waited in absolute darkness. From outside came the occasional cry of a night-bird, and once at our very window a long-drawn, cat-like whine, which told us that the cheetah was indeed at liberty. Far away we could hear the deep tones of the parish clock, which boomed out every quarter of an hour. How long they seemed, those quarters! Twelve struck, and one and two and three, and still we sat waiting silently for whatever might befall.

Suddenly there was the momentary gleam of a light up in the direction of the ventilator, which vanished immediately, but was succeeded by a strong smell of burning oil and heated metal. Some one in the next room had lit a dark-lantern. I heard a gentle sound of movement, and then all was silent once more, though the smell grew stronger. For half an hour I sat with straining ears. Then suddenly another sound became audible—a very gentle, soothing sound, like that of a small jet of steam escaping continually from a kettle. The instant that we heard it, Holmes sprang from the bed, struck a match, and lashed furiously with his cane at the bell-pull.

"You see it, Watson?" he yelled. "You see it?"

But I saw nothing. At the moment when Holmes struck the light I heard a low, clear whistle, but the sudden glare flashing into my weary eyes made it impossible for me to tell what it was at which my friend lashed so savagely. I could, however, see that his face was deadly pale, and filled with horror and loathing.

He had ceased to strike, and was gazing up at the ventilator, when suddenly there broke from the silence of the night the most horrible cry to which I have ever listened. It swelled up louder and louder, a hoarse yell of pain and fear and anger all mingled in the one dreadful shriek. They

say that away down in the village, and even in the distant parsonage, that cry raised the sleepers from their beds. It struck cold to our hearts, and I stood gazing at Holmes, and he at me, until the last echoes of it had died away into the silence from which it rose.

"What can it mean?" I gasped.

"It means that it is all over," Holmes answered. "And perhaps, after all, it is for the best. Take your pistol, and we will enter Dr. Roylott's room."

With a grave face he lit the lamp and led the way down the corridor. Twice he struck at the chamber door without any reply from within. Then he turned the handle and entered, I at his heels, with the cocked pistol in my hand.

It was a singular sight which met our eyes. On the table stood a dark-lantern with the shutter half open, throwing a brilliant beam of light upon the iron safe, the door of which was ajar. Beside this table, on the wooden chair, sat Dr. Grimesby Roylott, clad in a long gray dressing-gown, his bare ankles protruding beneath, and his feet thrust into red heelless Turkish slippers. Across his lap lay the short stock with the long lash which we had noticed during the day. His chin was cocked upward and his eyes were fixed in a dreadful, rigid stare at the corner of the ceiling. Round his brow he had a peculiar yellow band, with brownish speckles, which seemed to be bound tightly round his head. As we entered he made neither sound nor motion.

"The band! the speckled band!" whispered Holmes.

I took a step forward. In an instant his strange headgear began to move, and there reared itself from among his hair the squat diamond-shaped head and puffed neck of a loathsome serpent.

"It is a swamp adder!" cried Holmes; "the deadliest

snake in India. He has died within ten seconds of being bitten. Violence does, in truth, recoil upon the violent, and the schemer falls into the pit which he digs for another. Let us thrust this creature back into its den, and we can then remove Miss Stoner to some place of shelter, and let the county police know what has happened."

As he spoke he drew the dog-whip swiftly from the dead man's lap, and throwing the noose round the reptile's neck, he drew it from its horrid perch, and carrying it at arm's-length, threw it into the iron safe, which he closed upon it.

Such are the true facts of the death of Dr. Grimesby Roylott, of Stoke Moran. It is not necessary that I should prolong a narrative which has already run to too great a length, by telling how we broke the sad news to the terrified girl, how we conveyed her by the morning train to the care of her good aunt at Harrow, of how the slow process of official inquiry came to the conclusion that the doctor met his fate while indiscreetly playing with a dangerous pet. The little which I had yet to learn of the case was told me by Sherlock Holmes as we travelled back next day.

"I had," said he, "come to an entirely erroneous conclusion, which shows, my dear Watson, how dangerous it always is to reason from insufficient data. The presence of the gypsies, and the use of the word 'band,' which was used by the poor girl, no doubt to explain the appearance which she had caught a hurried glimpse of by the light of her match, were sufficient to put me upon an entirely wrong scent. I can only claim the merit that I instantly reconsidered my position when, however, it became clear to me that whatever danger threatened an occupant of the room could not come either from the window or the door. My attention was speedily drawn, as I have al-

ready remarked to you, to this ventilator, and to the bell-rope which hung down to the bed. The discovery that this was a dummy, and that the bed was clamped to the floor, instantly gave rise to the suspicion that the rope was there as bridge for something passing through the hole and coming to the bed. The idea of a snake instantly occurred to me, and when I coupled it with my knowledge that the doctor was furnished with a supply of creatures from India, I felt that I was probably on the right track. The idea of using a form of poison which could not possibly be discovered by any chemical test was just such a one as would occur to a clever and ruthless man who had had an Eastern training. The rapidity with which such a poison would take effect would also, from his point of view, be an advantage. It would be a sharp-eyed coroner, indeed, who could distinguish the two little dark punctures which would show where the poison fangs had done their work. Then I thought of the whistle. Of course he must recall the snake before the morning light revealed it to the victim. He had trained it, probably by the use of the milk which we saw, to return to him when summoned. He would put it through this ventilator at the hour that he thought best, with the certainty that it would crawl down the rope and land on the bed. It might or might not bite the occupant, perhaps she might escape every night for a week, but sooner or later she must fall a victim.

"I had come to these conclusions before ever I had entered his room. An inspection of his chair showed me that he had been in the habit of standing on it, which of course would be necessary in order that he should reach the ventilator. The sight of the safe, the saucer of milk, and the loop of whip-cord were enough to finally dispel any doubts which may have remained. The metallic clang heard by Miss Stoner was obviously caused by her step-

father hastily closing the door of his safe upon its terrible occupant. Having once made up my mind, you know the steps which I took in order to put the matter to the proof. I heard the creature hiss, as I have no doubt that you did also, and I instantly lit the light and attacked it."

"With the result of driving it through the ventilator."

"And also with the result of causing it to turn upon its master at the other side. Some of the blows of my cane came home, and roused its snakish temper, so that it flew upon the first person it saw. In this way I am no doubt indirectly responsible for Dr. Grimesby Roylott's death, and I cannot say that it is likely to weigh very heavily upon my conscience."

V

THE RUINOUS FACE

BY

Maurice Hewlett

The Ruinous Face[1]

Maurice Hewlett

WHEN the siege of Troy had been ten years doing, and most of the chieftains were dead, both of those afield and those who held the walls; and some had departed in their ships, and all who remained were leaden-hearted; there was one who felt the rage of war insatiate in his bowels: Menelaus, yellow-haired King of the Argives. He, indeed, rested not day or night, but knew the fever fretting at his members, and the burning in his heart. And when he scanned the windy plain about the city, and the desolation of it; and when he saw the huts of the Achæans, and the furrows where the chariots ploughed along the lines, and the charred places of camp-fires, smoke-blackened trees, and puddled waters of Scamander, and corn-lands and pastures which for ten years had known neither plough nor deep-breathed cattle, nor querulous sheep; even then in the heart of Menelaus was no pity for Dardan nor Greek, but only for himself and what he had lost—white-bosomed Helen, darling of Gods and men, and golden treasure of the house.

The vision of her glowing face and veiled eyes came to him in the night-season to make him mad, and in dreams he saw her, as once and many times he had seen her, lie

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supine. There as she lay in his dreams, all white and gold, thinner than the mist-wreath upon a mountain, he would cry aloud for his loss, and throw his arms out over the empty bed, and feel his eye-sockets smart for lack of tears; for tears came not to him, but his fever made his skin quite dry, and so were his eyes dry. Therefore, when the chiefs of the Achæans in Council, seeing how their strength was wearing down like a snowbank under the sun, looked reproachfully upon him, and thought of Hector slain, and of dead Achilles who slew him, of Priam, and of Diomede, and of tall Patroclus, he, Menelaus, took no heed at all, but sat in his place, and said: "There is no mercy for robbers of the house. Starve whom we cannot put to the sword. Lay closer leaguer. So shall I win my wife again and have honor among the Kings, my fellows." So he spake, for it was so he thought day and night; and Agamemnon, King of Men, bore with him, and carried the voices of all the Achæans. For since the death of Achilles there was no man stout enough to gainsay him, or deny him anything.

In those days there was little war, since every man outside the walls was sick of strife, and consumed with longing for his home, and wife and children there. And one told another, "My son will be a grown man in his first beard," and one, "My daughter will be a wife." As for the men of Troy, it was well for them that their foes were spent; for Hector was dead, and Agenor, and Troilus; and King Priam, the old, was fallen into dotage, which deprived him of counsel. He loved Alexandros only, whom men called Paris. On which account Æneas, the wise prince, stood apart, and kept himself within the walls of his house. There remained only that beauteous Paris, the ravisher. Him Helen held fast enchained by her white arms and slow, sweet smile, and by the shafts of light from her kind

eyes. All the compliance of a fair woman made for love lay in her; she could refuse nothing that was asked of her by him who had her. And she was gentle and very modest, and never dejected or low of heart; but when comfort was asked of her she gave it, and when solace, solace; and when he cried, "O for a deep draught of thee!" she gave him his desire. In these days he seldom left his hall, where she sat at the loom with her maids, or had them comb and braid her long hair. But of other women, wives and widows of heroes, Andromache mourned Hector dead and outraged, and Cassandra the wrath to come. Through the halls of the King's house came little sound but of women weeping loss; therefore, if love made Helen laugh sometimes, she laughed low and softly, lest some other should be offended. The streets were all silent, and the dogs ate one another. In the temples of the Gods they neglected the sacrifice, and what little might be offered was eaten by clouds of birds. Anniversaries and feasts were like common days. If the Gods were offended with Troy, there was no help for it. Men must live first, before they can serve God.

Now the tenth year was come to the Spring, when young men and virgins worship Artemis the Bright; and abroad on the plains the crocus was aflower, and the anemone; and the blades of the iris were like swords stuck hilt downward in the earth. A green veil spread lightly over the land, and men might see a tree scorched black upon one side and budded with gold upon the other. Melted snow brimmed Simois and Scamander; cranes and storks built their nests, and one stood sentinel while his mate sat close, watchful in the reeds. On the mild, westerly airs came tenderness to bedew the hearts of men war-weary. They stepped carefully lest they should crush young flowers,

thinking in their minds: "God's pity must restrain me. If so fair a thing can thrive in place so foul, who am I to mar it?" But upon Menelaus, the King, the season worked like a ferment, so that he could never stay long in one place. All night long he turned and stretched himself out; but in the gray of the morning he would rise, and walk abroad by himself over the silent land, and about the sleeping walls of the city. So found he balm for his ache, and so he did every day.

The house of Paris stood by the wall, and the garden upon the roof of the women's side was there upon it, and stretched far along the ramparts of Troy. King Menelaus knew it very well, for he had often seen Helen there with her maids when, with a veil to cover her face up to the eyes, she had stood there to watch the fighting, or the games about the pyre of some chieftain dead, or the manège of the ships lying off Tenedos. Indeed, when he had been there in his chariot, urging an attack upon the gate, he had seen Paris come out of the house to Helen where she stood in the garden; and he saw that deceiver take the lovely woman in his arm, and with his hand withdraw the veil from her mouth that he might look at it. The maids were all about her, and below raged a battle among men; but he cared nothing for these. No, but he lifted up her face by the chin, and stooped his head, and kissed her twice; and would have kissed her a third time, but that by chance he saw King Menelaus below him, who stood up in his chariot and watched. Then he turned lightly and left her, and went in, and so presently she too, with her veil in her hand, not yet over her mouth, looked down from the wall and saw the King, her husband. Long and deeply looked she; and he looked up at her; and so they stood, gazing each at the other. Then came women

from the house and veiled her mouth, and took her away. Other times, too, he had seen her there, but she not him: and now, at this turn of the year, the memory of her came bright and hard before him; and he walked under the wall of the house in the gray of the morning. And as he walked there fiercely on a day, behold she stood above him on the wall, veiled, and in a brown robe, looking down at him. And they looked at each other for a space of time. And nobody was by.

Shaking, he said, "O Ruinous Face, art thou so early from the wicked bed?"

She said low, "Yea, my lord, I am so early."

"These ten long years," he said then, "I have walked here at this hour, but never yet saw I thee."

She answered: "But I have seen my lord, for at this hour my lord Alexandros is accustomed to sleep and I to wake. And so I take the air, and am by myself."

"O God!" he said, "would that I could come at thee, lady." She replied him nothing. So, after a little while of looking, he spoke to her again, saying: "Is this true which thou makest me to think, that thou walkest here in order that thou mayst be by thyself? Is it true, O thou God-begotten?"

She said, smiling a little, "Is it so wonderful a thing that I should desire to be alone?"

"By my fathers," he said, "I think it wonderful. And more wonderful is it to me that it should be allowed thee." And then he looked earnestly at her, and asked her this: "Dost thou, therefore, desire that I should leave thee?"

"Nay," said she slowly, "I said not so."

"Ask me to stay, and I stay," he said. But she made no answer to that; but looked down to the earth at her feet. "Behold," said the King presently, "ten years and more since I have known my wife. Now if I were to cast

my spear at thee and rive open thy golden side, what wonder were it? Answer me that."

She looked long at him, that he saw the deep gray of her eyes. And he heard the low voice answer him, "I know that my lord would never do it." And he knew it better than she, and the reason as well as she.

A little while more they talked together, alone in the sunless light; and she was in a gentle mood, as indeed she always was, and calmed the fret in him, so that he could keep still and take long breaths, and look at her without burning in his heart. She asked him of their child, and when he told her it was well, stood thoughtful and silent. "Here," said she, presently, "I have no child"; and it seemed to him that she sighed.

"O Lady," he said, "dost thou regret nothing of all these ten long years?"

Her answer was to look long at him without speech. And then again she veiled her eyes with her eyelids and hung her head. He dared say nothing.

Paris came out of the house, fresh from the bath, rosy and beautiful, and whistled a low clear note, like the call of a bird at evening. Then he called upon Helen.

"Where is my love? Where is the Desire of the World?"

She looked up quickly at King Menelaus, and smiled half, and moved her hand; and she went to Paris. Then the King groaned, and rent himself. But he would not stay, nor look up, lest he should see what he dared not see.

Next day, very early, and every day after, those two, long-severed, kept a tryst: so in time she came to be there first, and a strife grew between them which should watch for the other. And after a little she would sit upon the

wall and speak happily to him without disguise. So happiness came to him, too, and he ceased to reproach her. For she reasoned very gently with him of her own case, urging him not to be angry with her. Defending herself, she said: "Thou shouldst not reproach me, husband, nor wouldst thou in thy heart if thou knewest what is in mine, or what my portion has been since with fair words in many-mansioned Sparta he did beguile me. With words smoother than honey, and sweeter than the comb of it he did beguile me, and with false words made me believe that I was forsaken and betrayed; and urged me to take ship with him in search of thee. Nor ever once did he reveal himself until we touched Cranæ in the ship. Then he showed me all his power, and declared his purpose with me. And I could do nothing against him; and so he brought me to Troy and kept me there. All these years he has loved, and still loves me in his fashion: and art thou angry with me, my lord, that I do not forever reproach him, or spend myself in tears, and fast, and go like one distraught, holding myself aloof from all his house? Nay, but of what avail would that be, or what reward to many that treat me well here in Troy? For King Priam, the old king, is good to me, and the Queen also; and my lord Hector was above all men good to me, and defended me always against scorn and evil report. True it is that I have been the reproach of men, both Trojans and Achæans; and all the woes of the years have been laid to me who am most guiltless of offence. For all my sin has been that I have been gentle with those who hold me here; and have not denied them that which cannot be denied, but have given what I must with fair-seeming."

And another time she said: "What mercy have men for a woman whom they desire and cannot have? And

what face have women for her who is more sought than them? And what of such a woman, O lord Menelaus, what of her in her misery? Is it true, thinkest thou, because she is good to look upon and is desired by men, that she should have no desires of her own? And must she have pleasure only in that which men seek of her, and none in her house and child overseas? Is my face, then, and are these my breasts all that I have? And is my mind nothing at all, nor the kindness in my heart, nor the joy I have in the busy world? My face has been ruin unto many, and many have sought my breasts; but to me it has been misery and shame, and my milk a bitter gall."

Thus spake Helen of the fair girdle; and he saw her eyes filled with tears, and pure sorrow upon her face; and he held up his arms to her, crying, "O my dear one, wilt thou not come back to me?" She could not speak for crying; but nodded her head often between her covering hands.

Then he, seeing how her thoughts lay, gently toward home, and desiring to please her now more than anything in the world, spake of the child, swearing by the Gods of Lacedæmon that she was not forgotten. "Nay," he said, "but still she talks of her mother, and every day would know of her return. And those about her in our house, faithful ones, say, 'The King thy father has gone to bring our lady back; and all will be happy again.' And so," said he, "it shall be, beloved, if thou wilt but come." Then Helen lifted up her face from her covering hands, and showed him her eyes. And he said, "O Wonder of the World, shall I come for thee?"

And her words were sped down the wall, soft as dropping rose-leaves: "Come soon." And King Menelaus returned to his quarters, glorying in his strength.

This day he took counsel with King Agamemnon his brother, and with Odysseus, wisest of the Achæans, and told them all. And while they pondered what the news might mean he declared his purpose, which was to have Helen again by all means, and to enter Troy disguised by night, and in the morning to drop with her in his arms over the wall, from the garden of Paris' house. But Odysseus dissuaded him, and so did the King his brother; for they knew very well that Troy must be sacked, and the Achæans satisfied with plunder, and death, and women. For after ten years of strife men raven for such things, and will not give over until they have them. Also it was written in the heart of Hera that the walls of Troy must be cast down, and the pride thereof made a byword. So it was that the counsel of King Menelaus was overpassed, and that of Odysseus prevailed. And with him lay the word that he should make his plan, and tell it over to Menelaus, that he might tell it again to Helen when he saw her on the wall.

At this time a great heart was in Helen, and strong purpose. And it was so that while Paris marvelled to see her beauty wax ever the clearer, and while he loved her more than ever he had, and found her compliance the sweeter, he guessed nothing of what spirit it was that possessed her, nor of what she did when she was by herself. Nor could he guess, since she refused him never what he asked of her, how she weighed him lightly beside Menelaus her husband; nor, while she let herself be loved, what soft desires were astir in her heart to be cherished as a wife, sharer of a man's hearth, partaker of his counsels, comforter in his troubles, and mother of his sons. But it came to pass that the only joy of her life was in the seeing King Menelaus in the morning, and in the reading in his

gaze the assurance of that peace which she longed for. And, again, her pride lay in fitting herself for it when it should come. Now, therefore, she forsook the religion of Aphrodite, to whom all her duty had been before, and in a grove of olive-trees in the garden of the house had built an altar to Artemis Aristoboulé. There offered she incense daily, and paid tribute of wheaten cakes kneaded with honey, and little figures of bears such as virgins offer to the Pure in Heart in Athens. And she would have whipped herself as they do in Sparta had she not feared discovery by him who still had her. So every day after speech with Menelaus the King about companionship and the sanctities of the wedded hearth, she prayed to the Goddess, saying: "O Chaste and Fair, by that pure face of thine and by thy untouched zone; by thy proud eyes and curving lip, and thy bow and scornful bitter arrows, aid thou me unhappy. Lo, now, Maid and Huntress, I make a vow. I will lay up in thy temple a fair wreath of box-leaves made of beaten gold on that day when my lord brings me home to my hearth and child, to be his friend and faithful companion, sharer of his joys and sorrows, and when he loves my proved and constant mind better than the bounty of my body. Hear me and fail me not, Lady of Grace." So prayed Helen, and then went back to the house, and suffered her lot, and cherished in her heart her high hope.

When all was in order in the plans of the Achæans, King Menelaus told everything to Helen his wife; and how Odysseus was to come disguised into the city and seek speech with her. To the which she listened, marking every word; and bowed her head in sign of agreement; and at the end was silent, looking down at her lap and deeply blushing. And at last she lifted her eyes and showed them

to the King, her husband, who marked them and her burning color, and knew that she had given him her heart again. So he returned that day to his quarters, glorifying and praising God. Immediately he went over to the tents of Odysseus, and sought out the prince, and said: "Go in, thou, this night, and the gray-eyed Goddess, the Maiden, befriend thee! This I know, Helen my wife shall be mine again before the moon have waned."

Odysseus nodded his head. "Enough said, Son of Atreus," said he. "I go in this night."

Now, in these days of weariness of strife, when the leaguer was not strict, the gates of Troy were often opened, now this one, now that, to let in fugitives from the hill-country. Odysseus, therefore, disguised himself as one of these, in sheepskin coat and swathes of rushes round his legs; and he stood with wounded feet, leaning upon a holly staff, as one of a throng. White dust was upon his beard, and sweat had made seams in the dust of his face and neck. Then, when they asked him at the gate, "Whence and what art thou, friend?" he answered: "I am a shepherd of the hills, named Glykon, whose store of sheep the Achæans have reived, whose wife stolen away, whose little ones put to the sword and fire. Me only have they left alive; and where should I come if not here?" So they let him in, and he came and stood in the hall of Paris with many other wretches. Then presently came Helen of the starry eyes and sweet pale face, she and her women to minister. And she knelt down with ewer and basin and a napkin to wash the feet of the poor. To whom, as she knelt at the feet of Odysseus, and rinsed his wounds and wiped away the dry blood, spake that crafty one in her ear, saying: "There are other wounds than mine for thy washing, lady, and deeper. For they are in the heart of King Menelaus, and in thy daughter's heart."

She kept her face hidden from him, bending to his feet; but he saw that she trembled and moved her shoulders. So then he said again: "I know that thou art pitiful. I know that thou wilt wash his wounds."

She answered him, whispering, "Yes; oh yes."

He said, "Let me have speech with thee, lady, when may be."

And she: "It shall be when my lord sleepeth toward morning. Watch thou for me here, before the sun rise." And he was satisfied with what she said.

Now, it was toward morning; and Odysseus watched in the hall of Paris. Then came Helen in, and stepped lightly over the bodies of sleeping men, and touched him on the shoulder where he sat by the wall with his chin upon his knees. Over her head was the hood of a dark-blue cloak; and the cloak fell to her feet. Her face was covered, not so but that he could see the good intention of her eyes. And he arose and stood beside her, and she beckoned him to follow after. Then she took him to the grove of olive-trees in the garden, and burned incense upon the altar she had set up, and laid her hand upon the altar of Artemis the Bright. "So do that quick Avenger to me," she said, "as she did to Amphion's wife, whenas her nostrils were filled with the wind of her rage, if I play false to thee, Odysseus." And Odysseus praised her. Then stooping, with her finger she traced the lines of Troy in the sand, and all the gates of it; and told over the number of the guard at each; and revealed the houses of the chiefs, where they stood, and the watches set.

Odysseus marked all in his heart. But he asked, "And which is the golden house of King Priam?"

She said: "Nay, but that I will not tell thee. For he has been always kind to me from the very first; and even

when Hector, his beloved, was slain, he had no ill words for me, though all Troy hissed me in the shrines of the Gods, and women spat upon the doors of Paris' house as they passed by. Him, an old man, thou shalt spare for my sake who am about to betray him."

Odysseus said: "Be it so. One marvel I have, lady, and it is this: If now, in these last days, thou wilt help thy people, why didst thou not before?"

She was silent for a while. Then she said, "I knew not then what now I know, that my lord, the King, loves me."

Odysseus marvelled. "Why," said he, "when all the hosts of the Achæans were gathered at his need, and out of all the nations of Hellas arose the cry of women bereaved and children fatherless, so that he might have thee again! And thou sayest, 'He loved thee not!'"

"Nay," said she quickly, "not so. But I knew very well that he desired me for his solace and delight, as other men have done and still do: but to be craved is one thing and to be loved is another thing. I am not all fair flesh, Odysseus: I am wife and mother, and I would be companion and comforter of a man. Now I know of a truth that my husband loveth me dearly; and I sicken of Paris, who maketh me his delight. Hateful to me are the ways of men with women. Have I not cause enough to hate them, these long years a plaything for his arms, and a fruit to allay the drouth of his eyes? Am I less a woman in that I am fair, or less woman grown because I can never be old? Now I loathe the sweet lore of Aphrodite, which she taught me too well; and all my hope is in that Blessed One whom men call Of Good Counsel. For, behold, love is a cruel thing of unending strife and wasting thought; but the ways of Artemis are ways of peace, and they shall be my ways."

A little longer he reasoned with her, and appointed a

day when the entry should be made; but then afterward, when light filled the earth and the coming of the sun was beaconed upon the tops of the mountains, she arose and said:

"My husband awaits me. I must go to him," and left Odysseus, and went to the wall to talk with Menelaus below it. In her hand was a yellow crocus, sacred to Artemis the Bright. And Helen put it to her lips, and touched her eyes with it, and dropped it down the wall to Menelaus her husband.

Then the Greeks fashioned a great horse out of wood, and set the images of two young kings upon it, with spears of gold, and stars upon their foreheads made of gold. And they caused it to be drawn to the Skæan Gate in the night-time, and left it there for the Trojans to see. Dolon made it; but Odysseus devised the images of the two kings. And his craft was justified of itself. For the Trojans hailed in the images the twin-brothers of Helen, even Castor and Polydeuces, come to save the state for their sister's sake; and opened wide their gates, and drew in the horse, and set it upon the porch of the temple of Zeus the Thunder. There it stood for all to see. And King Priam was carried down in his litter to behold it; and with him came Hecabe the Queen, and Paris, and Æneas, and Helen, with Cassandra the King's daughter.

Then King Priam lifted up his hands and blessed the horse and the riders thereof. And he said: "Hail to ye, great pair of brothers! Be favorable to us now, and speedy in your mercy."

But Cassandra wailed and tore at the covering of her breast, and cried out: "Ah, and they shall be speedy! Here is a woe come upon us which shall be mercy indeed to some of you. But for me there is no mercy."

Now was Helen, with softly shining eyes, close to the

horse; and she laid her hand upon its belly and stroked it. And Cassandra saw her and reviled her, saying: "Thou shame to Ilium, and thou curse! The Ruinous Face, the Ruinous Face! Cried I not so in the beginning when they praised thy low voice and soft beguiling ways? But thou too, thou shalt rue this night!"

But Helen laughed softly to herself, and stroked the smooth belly of the horse where her promise lay hidden. And they led Cassandra away, blind with weeping. And Helen returned to Paris' house and sought out Eutyches, a slave of the door, who loved her. Of him by gentle words and her slow sweet smile she besought arms: a sword, breastplate, shield, and helmet. And when he gave them her, unable to deny her anything, she hid them under the hangings of the bed.

That night Paris came to her where she lay bathed and anointed, and sought her in love; and she denied him nothing. He thought such joy had never been his since first he held her in his arms in Cranæ. Deeply and long he loved; and in the middle of the night a great horn blew afar off, and there came the sound of men in the streets, running. That was the horn which they kept in the temple of Showery Zeus, to summon all Troy when needs were. Paris, at the sound thereof, lifted up his head from Helen's fair breast, listening. And again the great horn blew a long blast, and he said: "O bride, I must leave thee. Behold, they call from the temple of the God." But she took his face in her two hands and turned it about to look at her; and he saw love in her eyes and the dew of it upon her mouth, and kissed her, and stayed. So by and by the horn blew a third time, and there arose a great shout; and he started away from her, and stepped down from the bed, and stood beside it, unresolved. Then Helen

put her arms about his body and urged herself toward him till her face touched his flank. And she clung to him, and looked up at him, and he stayed.

Now did rumor break out all at once, about the house and in the city afar off. Men cried, "The fire, the fire!" and "Save yourselves!" and "Oh, the Achæans!" and Paris tore himself away, and made haste to arm himself by the light of the fire in the city, which made the room as bright as day. And he put on all his harness, and took his sword and buckler, and ran out of the chamber and down the stairs, crying, "Arm ye, arm ye, and follow me!" Then Helen arose and swiftly withdrew the arms from below the bed, and called Eutyches to her from the gallery, and made him fasten the breastplate about her, and gird the thongs of the shield to her white arm, and fix the helmet of bronze upon her head. So he did, and trembled as he touched her; for he loved her out of measure and without hope. Then said she to Eutyches, "Arm thyself and follow me." And together, armed, they went down the stair.

There was a great press of men fighting about the doors of Paris' house, and loud rumor. But beyond in the city the Achæans in a multitude carried fire and sword from house to house. And there was the noise of women crying mercy, and calling their children's names. And the flames leaped roaring to heaven; and the Gods turned away their faces; and Troy was down.

Now Paris, fighting, came backward into the hall where Helen was; and Menelaus came fiercely after him, and in the doorway drove a spear at him that went through the leather of his shield, through all the folds of it and ran deep into the flesh of his throat where it fastens to the shoulder. Then Paris groaned and bent his knees, and

fell, calling Helen by her name. Then came she in her bright harness, with a burning face, and stood over the body of Paris, and held out her arms to the King, saying, "Husband, lord, behold, here am I, by your side!" Eutyches came after her, armed also.

Then Menelaus, with the bloody spear in his hand newly plucked from the neck of Paris, gazed at his wife, not knowing her. So presently he said, weak-voiced, "What is this, O loveliest in the world?" But he knew Eutyches again, who had been with him and her in Sparta, and said to him, "Disarm her, but with care, lest the bronze bruise her fair flesh." So Eutyches, trembling, disarmed her, that she stood a lovely woman before the King. And Menelaus, with a shout, took her in his arms and cried out above the fire and dust and shrieking in the street, "Come, come, my treasure and desire! Love me now or I die!"

But she clung to him, imploring. "Not here," she said, "not here, Menelaus. Take me hence; let me fare by thy side this night."

But he pressed her the closer, saying, "Come, thou must love me now," and lifted her in his arms and ran up the stair and through the gallery of the house to the great chamber where of late she had lain. And he called her women to disrobe her; and Helen fell to crying bitterly, and said, "Oh, I am a slave, I am a slave: I am bought and sold and handed about." And she could not be comforted or stayed from weeping. But nothing recked King Menelaus for that.

When the walls of wide-wayed Troy were cast down, and of the towers and houses of the chiefs nothing stood but staring walls and rafters charred by fire; and when the temples of the Dardan Gods had been sacked, and scorn done to the body of Priam the Old; and Cassandra

in the tent of King Agamemnon shuddered and rocked herself about; and when dogs had eaten the fair body of Paris, then the Achæans turned their eyes with longing to their homesteads. So there was a great ship-building and launching of keels; and at last King Menelaus embarked for peopled Lacedæmon, and took his lovely wife with him in the ship, and stayed his course at Rhodes for certain days, resting there with Helen. There he set a close guard about her all day; and as Paris had loved her, so loved he. But she was wretched, and spent her days in weeping; and grew pale and thin, and was forever scheming shifts how she might be delivered from such a life as she led. Ever by the door of the chamber stood Eutyches, and watched her closely, marking her distress. And she knew that he knew it; for what woman does not know the secret mind of a man with regard to her?

So, on a day, sat Helen by the window with her needlework in her lap, and looked out over the sea. Eutyches came into the room where she was, silently, through the hangings of the door, and kneeling to her, kissed her knee. She turned to him her sad face, saying, "What wouldst thou of me, Eutyches?"

"Lady," he said, "thy pardon first of all."

She smiled upon him. "Thou hast it," she said; "what then?"

He said to her: "Lady, I have served thee these many years, and no man knows thy mind better than I do, who know it only from thy face. For I have been but a house-dog in thy sight. But I have never read it wrongly; and now I know that thou art unhappy."

"Yes," she said, "it is true. I am very unhappy, and with reason."

Eutyches drew from his bosom a sharp sword and laid

it upon her knees. "Take this sovereign remedy from thy servant," he said. "No ills can withstand it, so sharp it is." And he left her with the bare sword upon her knees. She hid it in the coverings of the bed.

Now, when King Menelaus had feasted in the hall, he came immediately after into the Queen's chamber. And he said to her, "Hail, loveliest of women born!" and again, "Hail, thou Rose of the World!"

She answered him nothing, but went to her women and suffered herself to be made ready. Then came the King in to her and began to woo her; but she, looking strangely upon him by the light of the torch in the wall, sat up and held him off with her hand. "Touch me not, Menelaus," she said, "touch me no more until I know whether thou art true or false."

He was astonished at her, saying: "What is this, dear love? Dost thou call me false who for ten bitter years have striven to have thee again; and have forsworn all other women for thy sake?"

But her eyes were hard upon him, glittering. "Ay," she said, "and I do. For to thee, through those bitter years, I was faithful in heart, and utterly; and that which thou lovest is the bounty of my body, the which if I should mar it, thou wouldst spurn me as horrible. And now I will prove thee and my words together." So, while he gazed at her in wonder, she drew out the sword. "With this sword," she said, "I will do one of two things. Choose thou."

The King said, hollow-voiced, "What wilt thou do?"

She said, "With the sword I will lay open this poisonous face of mine"; and she touched her right cheek; "or with it I will cut off this my wicked breast"; and she put her hand upon her left breast, and said again, "Choose thou."

But Menelaus with a loud cry threw himself upon her,

and took each of her wrists in a hand, and held her down on the bed. The sword dropped out and fell to the floor; but he let it lie. Now his love waxed the greater for the danger she had been in. And in the morning, when as she lay as one dead, he picked up the sword and brake it, and threw it out of the window. Also before he left her he gave straight order that she should be watched throughout the day. But he gave the order to Eutyches, believing him to be faithful for his former and latter service.

By and by came Eutyches and spoke again with her, saying, "Lady, I fear me thou didst not use my remedy aright."

She heard him in a stare, and answered in a dry voice, "I fear so too."

Then said Eutyches: "There is but one way to use it. So shalt thou be free from pain and sorrow of heart." She would not look at him, but he knew that she understood his thought. "If thou wilt swear to me by Artemis the Bright," he said, "that thou wilt never use it against thyself, I will put another remedy on thy knees, lady."

She swore it; and he fetched her a sword, and put it on her knees. That night, in the dark, she slew her husband Menelaus, as he lay asleep by her side; and she knew that he was dead because, after groaning once, he neither moved nor stirred, and because his foot which was upon her ankle was heavy as lead.

Then came Eutyches in with a torch, and asked her if all was well. She told him what she had done; and Eutyches came close with the torch and saw that the King was dead. Then he said, "Before dawn we must depart, thou and I."

She said: "Where can I go? What will become of me?"

He gazed upon her, saying, "I will love thee forever, as I have these twelve years and more."

She said to him, "I will go now if thou wilt help me, Eutyches."

He said, "I will help thee when I can."

Then Helen looked at him, and saw his eyes, and was horribly afraid. She said, "I know not whether I can trust thee"; but he answered her:

"Have I not proved that to thee? Did I not give thee the sword with which to free thyself?"

"Yea," she said, "but have I freed myself indeed?"

He stretched out his arms to her, saying: "Free? Yes, thou art free, most glorious one. And now I too am free to love thee."

But she used craft in her fear, saying: "I am soiled with wicked blood. Stay thou here, Eutyches, and I will purify myself, and oe as thou wouldst have me."

And he let her go with a kiss, saying: "Be quick. Have I not waited twelve years?"

Then Helen arose and went out of the chamber, and out of the house into the garden. And she stood before the altar of Artemis Eileithyia, and prayed before it, saying, "O Holy One, I give thee thanks indeed that now I know the way of peace."

And then she went farther into the grove of ilex-trees where the altar and the image stood, and took off her girdle and bound it straightly round her neck. And she clomb the tree, and tied the end of the girdle about the branch thereof; and afterward cast herself down, and hung there quite still. And the cord which she used was of silk, and had girt her raiment about her, below her fair breasts.

VI

A NEW ENGLAND NUN

BY

Mary E. Wilkins

A New England Nun[1]

Mary E. Wilkins

It was late in the afternoon, and the light was waning. There was a difference in the look of the tree shadows out in the yard. Somewhere in the distance cows were lowing and a little bell was tinkling; now and then a farm-wagon tilted by, and the dust flew; some blue-shirted laborers with shovels over their shoulders plodded past; little swarms of flies were dancing up and down before the people's faces in the soft air. There seemed to be a gentle stir arising over everything for the mere sake of subsidence—a very premonition of rest and hush and night.

This soft diurnal commotion was over Louisa Ellis also. She had been peacefully sewing at her sitting-room window all the afternoon. Now she quilted her needle carefully into her work, which she folded precisely, and laid in a basket with her thimble and thread and scissors. Louisa Ellis could not remember that ever in her life she had mislaid one of these little feminine appurtenances, which had become, from long use and constant association, a very part of her personality.

Louisa tied a green apron round her waist, and got out a flat straw hat with a green ribbon. Then she went into the garden with a little blue crockery bowl, to pick some currants for her tea. After the currants were picked she

[1] From *A New England Nun and Other Stories*. Copyright, 1891, by Harper & Brothers.

sat on the back door-step and stemmed them, collecting the stems carefully in her apron, and afterward throwing them into the hen-coop. She looked sharply at the grass beside the step to see if any had fallen there.

Louisa was slow and still in her movements; it took her a long time to prepare her tea; but when ready it was set forth with as much grace as if she had been a veritable guest to her own self. The little square table stood exactly in the centre of the kitchen, and was covered with a starched linen cloth whose border pattern of flowers glistened. Louisa had a damask napkin on her tea-tray, where were arranged a cut-glass tumbler full of teaspoons, a silver cream-pitcher, a china sugar-bowl, and one pink china cup and saucer. Louisa used china every day—something which none of her neighbors did. They whispered about it among themselves. Their daily tables were laid with common crockery, their sets of best china stayed in the parlor closet, and Louisa Ellis was no richer nor better bred than they. Still she would use the china. She had for her supper a glass dish full of sugared currants, a plate of little cakes, and one of light white biscuits. Also a leaf or two of lettuce, which she cut up daintily. Louisa was very fond of lettuce, which she raised to perfection in her little garden. She ate quite heartily, though in a delicate, pecking way; it seemed almost surprising that any considerable bulk of the food should vanish.

After tea she filled a plate with nicely baked thin corn-cakes, and carried them out into the back-yard.

"Cæsar!" she called. "Cæsar! Cæsar!"

There was a little rush, and the clank of a chain, and a large yellow-and-white dog appeared at the door of his tiny hut, which was half hidden among the tall grasses and flowers. Louisa patted him and gave him the corn-cakes. Then she returned to the house and washed the tea-things,

polishing the china carefully. The twilight had deepened; the chorus of the frogs floated in at the open window wonderfully loud and shrill, and once in a while a long sharp drone from a tree-toad pierced it. Louisa took off her green gingham apron, disclosing a shorter one of pink-and-white print. She lighted her lamp, and sat down again with her sewing.

In about half an hour Joe Dagget came. She heard his heavy step on the walk, and rose and took off her pink-and-white apron. Under that was still another—white linen with a little cambric edging on the bottom; that was Louisa's company apron. She never wore it without her calico sewing-apron over it unless she had a guest. She had barely folded the pink-and-white one with methodical haste and laid it in a table-drawer when the door opened and Joe Dagget entered.

He seemed to fill up the whole room. A little yellow canary that had been asleep in his green cage at the south window woke up and fluttered wildly, beating his little yellow wings against the wires. He always did so when Joe Dagget came into the room.

"Good-evening," said Louisa. She extended her hand with a kind of solemn cordiality.

"Good-evening, Louisa," returned the man, in a loud voice.

She placed a chair for him, and they sat facing each other, with the table between them. He sat bolt-upright, toeing out his heavy feet squarely, glancing with a good-humored uneasiness around the room. She sat gently erect, folding her slender hands in her white-linen lap.

"Been a pleasant day," remarked Dagget.

"Real pleasant," Louisa assented, softly. "Have you been haying?" she asked, after a little while.

"Yes, I've been haying all day, down in the ten-acre lot. Pretty hot work."

"It must be."

"Yes, it's pretty hot work in the sun."

"Is you mother well to-day?"

"Yes, mother's pretty well."

"I suppose Lily Dyer's with her now?"

Dagget colored. "Yes, she's with her," he answered, slowly.

He was not very young, but there was a boyish look about his large face. Louisa was not quite as old as he, her face was fairer and smoother, but she gave people the impression of being older.

"I suppose she's a good deal of help to your mother," she said, further.

"I guess she is; I don't know how mother 'd get along without her," said Dagget, with a sort of embarrassed warmth.

"She looks like a real capable girl. She's pretty-looking too," remarked Louisa.

"Yes, she is pretty fair-looking."

Presently Dagget began fingering the books on the table. There was a square red autograph album, and a Young Lady's Gift-Book which had belonged to Louisa's mother. He took them up one after the other and opened them; then laid them down again, the album on the Gift-Book.

Louisa kept eying them with mild uneasiness. Finally she rose and changed the position of the books, putting the album underneath. That was the way they had been arranged in the first place.

Dagget gave an awkward little laugh. "Now what difference did it make which book was on top?" said he.

Louisa looked at him with a deprecating smile. "I always keep them that way," murmured she.

"You do beat everything," said Dagget, trying to laugh again. His large face was flushed.

He remained about an hour longer, then rose to take leave. Going out, he stumbled over a rug, and, trying to recover himself, hit Louisa's work-basket on the table, and knocked it on the floor.

He looked at Louisa, then at the rolling spools; he ducked himself awkwardly toward them, but she stopped him. "Never mind," said she; "I'll pick them up after you're gone."

She spoke with a mild stiffness. Either she was a little disturbed, or his nervousness affected her, and made her seem constrained in her effort to reassure him.

When Joe Dagget was outside he drew in the sweet evening air with a sigh, and felt much as an innocent and perfectly well-intentioned bear might after his exit from a china shop.

Louisa, on her part, felt much as the kind-hearted, long-suffering owner of the china shop might have done after the exit of the bear.

She tied on the pink, then the green apron, picked up all the scattered treasures and replaced them in her work-basket, and straightened the rug. Then she set the lamp on the floor, and began sharply examining the carpet. She even rubbed her fingers over it, and looked at them.

"He's tracked in a good deal of dust," she murmured. "I thought he must have."

Louisa got a dust-pan and brush, and swept Joe Dagget's track carefully.

If he could have known it, it would have increased his perplexity and uneasiness, although it would not have disturbed his loyalty in the least. He came twice a week to see Louisa Ellis, and every time, sitting there in her delicately sweet room, he felt as if surrounded by a hedge of lace. He was afraid to stir lest he should put a clumsy foot or hand through the fairy web, and he had always the

consciousness that Louisa was watching fearfully lest he should.

Still the lace and Louisa commanded perforce his perfect respect and patience and loyalty. They were to be married in a month, after a singular courtship which had lasted for a matter of fifteen years. For fourteen out of the fifteen years the two had not once seen each other, and they had seldom exchanged letters. Joe had been all those years in Australia, where he had gone to make his fortune, and where he had stayed until he made it. He would have stayed fifty years if it had taken so long, and come home feeble and tottering, or never come home at all, to marry Louisa.

But the fortune had been made in the fourteen years, and he had come home now to marry the woman who had been patiently and unquestioningly waiting for him all that time.

Shortly after they were engaged he had announced to Louisa his determination to strike out into new fields, and secure a competency before they should be married. She had listened and assented with the sweet serenity which never failed her, not even when her lover set forth on that long and uncertain journey. Joe, buoyed up as he was by his sturdy determination, broke down a little at the last, but Louisa kissed him with a mild blush, and said good-bye.

"It won't be for long," poor Joe had said, huskily; but it was for fourteen years.

In that length of time much had happened. Louisa's mother and brother had died, and she was all alone in the world. But greatest happening of all—a subtle happening which both were too simple to understand—Louisa's feet had turned into a path, smooth maybe under a calm, serene sky, but so straight and unswerving that it could only meet a check at her grave, and so narrow that there was no room for any one at her side.

Louisa's first emotion when Joe Dagget came home (he had not apprised her of his coming) was consternation, although she would not admit it to herself, and he never dreamed of it. Fifteen years ago she had been in love with him — at least she considered herself to be. Just at that time, gently acquiescing with and falling into the natural drift of girlhood, she had seen marriage ahead as a reasonable feature and a probable desirability of life. She had listened with calm docility to her mother's views upon the subject. Her mother was remarkable for her cool sense and sweet, even temperament. She talked wisely to her daughter when Joe Dagget presented himself, and Louisa accepted him with no hesitation. He was the first lover she had ever had.

She had been faithful to him all these years. She had never dreamed of the possibility of marrying any one else. Her life, especially for the last seven years, had been full of a pleasant peace, she had never felt discontented nor impatient over her lover's absence; still she had always looked forward to his return and their marriage as the inevitable conclusion of things. However, she had fallen into a way of placing it so far in the future that it was almost equal to placing it over the boundaries of another life.

When Joe came she had been expecting him, and ex-expecting to be married for fourteen years, but she was as much surprised and taken aback as if she had never thought of it.

Joe's consternation came later. He eyed Louisa with an instant confirmation of his old admiration. She had changed but little. She still kept her pretty manner and soft grace, and was, he considered, every whit as attractive as ever. As for himself, his stent was done; he had turned his face away from fortune-seeking, and the old winds of

romance whistled as loud and sweet as ever through his ears. All the song which he had been wont to hear in them was Louisa; he had for a long time a loyal belief that he heard it still, but finally it seemed to him that although the winds sang always that one song, it had another name. But for Louisa the wind had never more than murmured; now it had gone down, and everything was still. She listened for a little while with half-wistful attention; then she turned quietly away and went to work on her wedding-clothes.

Joe had made some extensive and quite magnificent alterations in his house. It was the old homestead; the newly married couple would live there, for Joe could not desert his mother, who refused to leave her old home. So Louisa must leave hers. Every morning, rising and going about among her neat maidenly possessions, she felt as one looking her last upon the faces of dear friends. It was true that in a measure she could take them with her, but, robbed of their old environments, they would appear in such new guises that they would almost cease to be themselves. Then there were some peculiar features of her happy solitary life which she would probably be obliged to relinquish altogether. Sterner tasks than these graceful but half-needless ones would probably devolve upon her. There would be a large house to care for; there would be company to entertain; there would be Joe's rigorous and feeble old mother to wait upon; and it would be contrary to all thrifty village traditions for her to keep more than one servant. Louisa had a little still, and she used to occupy herself pleasantly in summer weather with distilling the sweet and aromatic essences from roses and peppermint and spearmint. By-and-by her still must be laid away. Her store of essences was already considerable, and there would be no time for her to distil for the mere

pleasure of it. Then Joe's mother would think it foolishness; she had already hinted her opinion in the matter. Louisa dearly loved to sew a linen seam, not always for use, but for the simple, mild pleasure which she took in it. She would have been loath to confess how more than once she had ripped a seam for the mere delight of sewing it together again. Sitting at her window during long sweet afternoons, drawing her needle gently through the dainty fabric, she was peace itself. But there was small chance of such foolish comfort in the future. Joe's mother, domineering, shrewd old matron that she was even in her old age, and very likely even Joe himself, with his honest masculine rudeness, would laugh and frown down all these pretty but senseless old-maiden ways.

Louisa had almost the enthusiasm of an artist over the mere order and cleanliness of her solitary home. She had throbs of genuine triumph at the sight of the window-panes which she had polished until they shone like jewels. She gloated gently over her orderly bureau-drawers, with their exquisitely folded contents redolent with lavender and sweet clover and very purity. Could she be sure of the endurance of even this? She had visions, so startling that she half repudiated them as indelicate, of coarse masculine belongings strewn about in endless litter; of dust and disorder arising necessarily from a coarse masculine presence in the midst of all this delicate harmony.

Among her forebodings of disturbance, not the least was with regard to Cæsar. Cæsar was a veritable hermit of a dog. For the greater part of his life he had dwelt in his secluded hut, shut out from the society of his kind and all innocent canine joys. Never had Cæsar since his early youth watched at a woodchuck's hole; never had he known the delights of a stray bone at a neighbor's kitchen door. And it was all on account of a sin committed when hardly

out of his puppyhood. No one knew the possible depth of remorse of which this mild-visaged, altogether innocent-looking old dog might be capable; but whether or not he had encountered remorse, he had encountered a full measure of righteous retribution. Old Cæsar seldom lifted up his voice in a growl or a bark; he was fat and sleepy; there were yellow rings which looked like spectacles around his dim old eyes; but there was a neighbor who bore on his hand the imprint of several of Cæsar's sharp, white, youthful teeth, and for that he had lived at the end of a chain, all alone in a little hut, for fourteen years. The neighbor, who was choleric and smarting with the pain of his wound, had demanded either Cæsar's death or complete ostracism. So Louisa's brother, to whom the dog had belonged, had built him his little kennel and tied him up. It was now fourteen years since, in a flood of youthful spirits, he had inflicted that memorable bite, and with the exception of short excursions, always at the end of the chain, under the strict guardianship of his master or Louisa, the old dog had remained a close prisoner. It is doubtful if, with his limited ambition, he took much pride in the fact, but it is certain that he was possessed of considerable cheap fame. He was regarded by all the children in the village and by many adults as a very monster of ferocity. St. George's dragon could hardly have surpassed in evil repute Louisa Ellis's old yellow dog. Mothers charged their children with solemn emphasis not to go too near to him, and the children listened and believed greedily, with a fascinated appetite for terror, and ran by Louisa's house stealthily, with many sidelong and backward glances at the terrible dog. If perchance he sounded a hoarse bark, there was a panic. Wayfarers chancing into Louisa's yard eyed him with respect, and inquired if the chain were stout. Cæsar at large might have seemed a very ordinary

dog, and excited no comment whatever; chained, his reputation overshadowed him, so that he lost his own proper outlines and looked darkly vague and enormous. Joe Dagget, however, with his good-humored sense and shrewdness, saw him as he was. He strode valiantly up to him and patted him on the head, in spite of Louisa's soft clamor of warning, and even attempted to set him loose. Louisa grew so alarmed that he desisted, but kept announcing his opinion in the matter quite forcibly at intervals. "There ain't a better-natured dog in town," he would say, "and it's downright cruel to keep him tied up there. Some day I'm going to take him out."

Louisa had very little hope that he would not, one of these days, when their interests and possessions should be more completely fused in one. She pictured to herself Cæsar on the rampage through the quiet and unguarded village. She saw innocent children bleeding in his path. She was herself very fond of the old dog, because he had belonged to her dead brother, and he was always very gentle with her; still she had great faith in his ferocity. She always warned people not to go too near him. She fed him on ascetic fare of corn-mush and cakes, and never fired his dangerous temper with heating and sanguinary diet of flesh and bones. Louisa looked at the old dog munching his simple fare, and thought of her approaching marriage and trembled. Still no anticipation of disorder and confusion in lieu of sweet peace and harmony, no forebodings of Cæsar on the rampage, no wild fluttering of her little yellow canary, were sufficient to turn her a hair's-breadth. Joe Dagget had been fond of her and working for her all these years. It was not for her, whatever came to pass, to prove untrue and break his heart. She put the exquisite little stitches into her wedding-garments, and the time went on until it was only a week before her

wedding-day. It was a Tuesday evening, and the wedding was to be a week from Wednesday.

There was a full moon that night. About nine o'clock Louisa strolled down the road a little way. There were harvest-fields on either hand, bordered by low stone walls. Luxuriant clumps of bushes grew beside the wall, and trees—wild cherry and old apple trees—at intervals. Presently Louisa sat down on the wall and looked about her with mildly sorrowful reflectiveness. Tall shrubs of blueberry and meadow-sweet, all woven together and tangled with blackberry vines and horsebriers, shut her in on either side. She had a little clear space between them. Opposite her, on the other side of the road, was a spreading tree; the moon shone between its boughs, and the leaves twinkled like silver. The road was bespread with a beautiful shifting dapple of silver and shadow; the air was full of a mysterious sweetness. "I wonder if it's wild grapes?" murmured Louisa. She sat there some time. She was just thinking of rising, when she heard footsteps and low voices, and remained quiet. It was a lonely place, and she felt a little timid. She thought she would keep still in the shadow and let tne persons, whoever they might be, pass her.

But just before they reached her the voices ceased, and the footsteps. She understood that their owners had also found seats upon the stone wall. She was wondering if she could not steal away unobserved, when the voice broke the stillness. It was Joe Dagget's. She sat still and listened.

The voice was announced by a loud sigh, which was as familiar as itself. "Well," said Dagget, "you've made up your mind, then, I suppose?"

"Yes," returned another voice; "I'm going day after to-morrow."

"That's Lily Dyer," thought Louisa to herself. The

voice embodied itself in her mind. She saw a girl tall and full-figured, with a firm, fair face, looking fairer and firmer in the moonlight, her strong yellow hair braided in a close knot. A girl full of a calm rustic strength and bloom, with a masterful way which might have beseemed a princess. Lily Dyer was a favorite with the village folk; she had just the qualities to arouse the admiration. She was good and handsome and smart. Louisa had often heard her praises sounded.

"Well," said Joe Dagget, "I ain't got a word to say."

"I don't know what you could say," returned Lily Dyer.

"Not a word to say," repeated Joe, drawing out the words heavily. Then there was a silence. "I ain't sorry," he began at last, "that that happened yesterday—that we kind of let on how we felt to each other. I guess it's just as well we knew. Of course, I can't do anything any different. I'm going right on an' get married next week. I ain't going back on a woman that's waited for me fourteen years, an' break her heart."

"If you should jilt her to-morrow, I wouldn't have you," spoke up the girl, with sudden vehemence.

"Well, I ain't going to give you the chance," said he; "but I don't believe you would, either."

"You'd see I wouldn't. Honor's honor, an' right's right. An' I'd never think anything of any man that went against 'em for me or any other girl; you'd find that out, Joe Dagget."

"Well, you'll find out fast enough that I ain't going against 'em for you or any other girl," returned he. Their voices sounded almost as if they were angry with each other. Louisa was listening eagerly.

"I'm sorry you feel as if you must go away," said Joe, "but I don't know but it's best."

"Of course it's best. I hope you and I have got common-sense."

"Well, I suppose you're right." Suddenly Joe's voice got an undertone of tenderness. "Say, Lily," said he, "I'll get along well enough myself, but I can't bear to think—You don't suppose you're going to fret much over it?"

"I guess you'll find out I sha'n't fret much over a married man."

"Well, I hope you won't—I hope you won't, Lily. God knows I do. And—I hope—one of these days—you'll—come across somebody else—"

"I don't see any reason why I shouldn't." Suddenly her tone changed. She spoke in a sweet, clear voice, so loud that she could have been heard across the street. "No, Joe Dagget," said she, "I'll never marry any other man as long as I live. I've got good sense, an' I ain't going to break my heart nor make a fool of myself; but I'm never going to be married, you can be sure of that. I ain't that sort of a girl to feel this way twice."

Louisa heard an exclamation and a soft commotion behind the bushes; then Lily spoke again—the voice sounded as if she had risen. "This must be put a stop to," said she. "We've stayed here long enough. I'm going home."

Louisa sat there in a daze, listening to their retreating steps. After a while she got up and slunk softly home herself. The next day she did her housework methodically; that was as much a matter of course as breathing; but she did not sew on her wedding-clothes. She sat at her window and meditated. In the evening Joe came. Louisa Ellis had never known that she had any diplomacy in her, but when she came to look for it that night she found it, although meek of its kind, among her little feminine weapons. Even now she could hardly believe that she had heard aright, and that she would not do Joe

a terrible injury should she break her troth-plight. She wanted to sound him without betraying too soon her own inclinations in the matter. She did it successfully, and they finally came to an understanding; but it was a difficult thing, for he was as afraid of betraying himself as she.

She never mentioned Lily Dyer. She simply said that while she had no cause of complaint against him, she had lived so long in one way that she shrank from making a change.

"Well, I never shrank, Louisa," said Dagget. "I'm going to be honest enough to say that I think maybe it's better this way; but if you'd wanted to keep on, I'd have stuck to you till my dying day. I hope you know that."

"Yes, I do," said she.

That night she and Joe parted more tenderly than they had done for a long time. Standing in the door, holding each other's hands, a last great wave of regretful memory swept over them.

"Well, this ain't the way we've thought it was all going to end, is it, Louisa?" said Joe.

She shook her head. There was a little quiver on her placid face.

"You let me know if there's ever anything I can do for you," said he. "I ain't ever going to forget you, Louisa." Then he kissed her, and went down the path.

Louisa, all alone by herself that night, wept a little, she hardly knew why; but the next morning, on waking, she felt like a queen who, after fearing lest her domain be wrested away from her, sees it firmly insured in her possession.

Now the tall weeds and grasses might cluster around Cæsar's little hermit hut, the snow might fall on its roof year in and year out, but he never would go on a rampage through the unguarded village. Now the little canary

might turn itself into a peaceful yellow ball night after night, and have no need to wake and flutter with wild terror against its bars. Louisa could sew linen seams, and distil roses, and dust and polish and fold away in lavender, as long as she listed. That afternoon she sat with her needle-work at the window, and felt fairly steeped in peace. Lily Dyer, tall and erect and blooming, went past; but she felt no qualm. If Louisa Ellis had sold her birthright she did not know it, the taste of the pottage was so delicious, and had been her sole satisfaction for so long. Serenity and placid narrowness had become to her as the birthright itself. She gazed ahead through a long reach of future days strung together like pearls in a rosary, every one like the others, and all smooth and flawless and innocent, and her heart went up in thankfulness. Outside was the fervid summer afternoon; the air was filled with the sounds of the busy harvest of men and birds and bees; there were halloos, metallic clatterings, sweet calls, and long hummings. Louisa sat, prayerfully numbering her days, like an uncloistered nun.

VII

A PRAIRIE VAGABOND

BY

Gilbert Parker

A Prairie Vagabond[1]

Gilbert Parker

LITTLE HAMMER was not a success. He was a disappointment to the missionaries; the officials of the Hudson's Bay Company said he was "no good"; the Mounted Police kept an eye on him; the Crees and Blackfeet would have nothing to do with him; and the half-breeds were profane regarding him. But Little Hammer was oblivious to any depreciation of his merits, and would not be suppressed. He loved the Hudson's Bay Company's Post at Yellow Quill with an unwavering love; he ranged the half-breed hospitality of Red Deer River, regardless of it being thrown at him as he in turn threw it at his dog; he saluted Sergeant Gellatly with a familiar *How!* whenever he saw him; he borrowed *tabac* of the half-breed women, and, strange to say, paid it back—with other *tabac* got by daily petition, until his prayer was granted, at the H. B. C. Post. He knew neither shame nor defeat, but where women were concerned he kept his word, and was singularly humble. It was a woman that induced him to be baptized. The day after the ceremony he begged "the loan of a dollar for the love of God" from the missionary; and being refused, straightway, and for the only time it was known of him, delivered a rumbling torrent of half-breed profanity, mixed with the unusual oaths of the bar-

[1] From *Pierre and His People*. Copyright, 1894, by Stone & Kimball. Copyright, 1898, by Harper & Brothers.

racks. Then he walked away with great humility. There was no swagger about Little Hammer. He was simply unquenchable and continuous. He sometimes got drunk; but on such occasions he sat down, or lay down, in the most convenient place, and, like Cæsar beside Pompey's statue, wrapped his mantle about his face and forgot the world. He was a vagabond Indian, abandoned yet self-contained, outcast yet gregarious. No social ostracism unnerved him, no threats of the H. B. C. officials moved him; and when in the winter of 1876 he was driven from one place to another, starving and homeless, and came at last emaciated and nearly dead to the Post at Yellow Quill, he asked for food and shelter as if it were his right, and not as a mendicant.

One night, shortly after his reception and restoration, he was sitting in the store, silently smoking the Company's *tabac*. Sergeant Gellatly entered. Little Hammer rose, offered his hand, and muttered, "*How!*"

The Sergeant thrust his hand aside, and said sharply: "Whin I take y'r hand, Little Hammer, it 'll be to put a grip on y'r wrists that 'll stay there till y'are in quarters out of which y'll come nayther winter nor summer. Put that in y'r pipe and smoke it, y' scamp!"

Little Hammer had a bad time at the Post that night. Lounging half-breeds reviled him; the H. B. C. officials rebuked him; and travellers who were coming and going shared in the derision, as foolish people do where one is brow-beaten by many. At last a trapper entered, whom seeing, Little Hammer drew his blanket up about his head. The trapper sat down very near Little Hammer, and began to smoke. He laid his *plug-tabac* and his knife on the counter beside him. Little Hammer reached over and took the knife, putting it swiftly within his blanket. The trapper saw the act, and, turning sharply on the Indian,

called him a thief. Little Hammer chuckled strangely and said nothing; but his eyes peered sharply above the blanket. A laugh went round the store. In an instant the trapper, with a loud oath, caught at the Indian's throat; but as the blanket dropped back he gave a startled cry. There was the flash of a knife, and he fell back dead. Little Hammer stood above him, smiling, for a moment, and then, turning to Sergeant Gellatly, held out his arms silently for the handcuffs.

The next day two men were lost on the prairies. One was Sergeant Gellatly; the other was Little Hammer. The horses they rode travelled so close that the leg of the Indian crowded the leg of the white man; and the wilder the storm grew, the closer still they rode. A *poudre* day, with its steely air and fatal frost, was an ill thing in the world; but these entangling blasts, these wild curtains of snow, were desolating even unto death. The sun above was smothered; the earth beneath was trackless; the compass stood for loss all round.

What could Sergeant Gellatly expect, riding with a murderer on his left hand: a heathen that had sent a knife through the heart of one of the lords of the North? What should the gods do but frown, or the elements be at, but howling on their path? What should one hope for but that vengeance should be taken out of the hands of mortals, and be delivered to the angry spirits?

But if the gods were angry at the Indian, why should Sergeant Gellatly only sway to and fro, and now laugh recklessly, and now fall sleepily forward on the neck of his horse; while the Indian rode straight, and neither wavered nor wandered in mind, but at last slipped from his horse and walked beside the other? It was at this moment that the soldier heard, "Sergeant Gellatly, Sergeant Gellatly," called through the blast; and he thought

it came from the skies, or from some other world. "Me darlin'," he said, "have y' come to me?" But the voice called again: "Sergeant Gellatly, keep awake! keep awake! You sleep, you die; that's it. Holy. Yes. *How!*" Then he knew that it was Little Hammer calling in his ear, and shaking him; that the Indian was dragging him from his horse . . . his revolver, where was it? he had forgotten . . . he nodded . . . nodded. But little Hammer said: "Walk, hell! you walk, yes"; and Little Hammer struck him again and again; but one arm of the Indian was under his shoulder and around him, and the voice was anxious and kind. Slowly it came to him that Little Hammer was keeping him alive against the will of the spirits—but why should they strike him instead of the Indian? Was there any sun in the world? Had there ever been? or fire or heat anywhere, or anything but wind and snow in all God's universe? . . . Yes, there were bells ringing—soft bells of a village church; and there was incense burning—most sweet it was! and the coals in the censer—how beautiful! how comforting! He laughed with joy again, and he forgot how cold, how maliciously cold, he had been; he forgot how dreadful that hour was before he became warm; when he was pierced by myriad needles through the body, and there was an incredible aching at his heart.

And yet something kept thundering on his body, and a harsh voice shrieked at him, and there were many lights dancing over his shut eyes; and then curtains of darkness were dropped, and centuries of oblivion came, and his eyes opened to a comforting silence, and some one was putting brandy between his teeth, and after a time he heard a voice say: "*Bien*, you see he was a murderer, but he save his captor. *Voilà*, such a heathen! But you will, all the same, bring him to justice—you call it that. But we shall see."

Then some one replied, and the words passed through an outer web of darkness and an inner haze of dreams. "The feet of Little Hammer were like wood on the floor when you brought the two in, Pretty Pierre—and lucky for them you found them. . . . The thing would read right in a book, but it's not according to the run of things up here, not by a damned sight!"

"Private Bradshaw," said the first voice again, "you do not know Little Hammer, nor that story of him. You wait for the trial. I have something to say. You think Little Hammer care for the prison, the rope?—Ah, when a man wait five years to kill—so! and it is done, he is glad sometimes when it is all over. Sergeant Gellatly there will wish he went to sleep forever in the snow, if Little Hammer come to the rope. Yes, I think."

And Sergeant Gellatly's brain was so numbed that he did not grasp the meaning of the words, though he said them over and over again. . . . Was he dead? No, for his body was beating, beating . . . well, it didn't matter . . . nothing mattered . . . he was sinking to forgetfulness . . . sinking.

So, for hours, for weeks—it might have been for years—and then he woke, clear and knowing, to "the unnatural, intolerable day"—it was that to him, with Little Hammer in prison. It was March when his memory and vigor vanished; it was May when he grasped the full remembrance of himself, and of that fight for life on the prairie; of the hands that smote him that he should not sleep; of Little Hammer the slayer, who had driven death back discomfited, and brought his captor safe to where his own captivity and punishment awaited him.

When Sergeant Gellatly appeared in court at the trial he refused to bear witness against Little Hammer. "D'ye think—does wan av y' think—that I'll spake a word agin

the man—haythen or no haythen—that pulled me out of me tomb and put me betune the barrack quilts? Here's the stripes aff me arm, and to jail I'll go; but for what wint before I clapt the iron on his wrists, good or avil, divil a word will I say. An' here's me left hand, and there's me right fut, and an eye of me too, that I'd part with, for the cause of him that's done a trick that your honor wouldn't do—an' no shame to y' aither—an' y'd been where Little Hammer was with me."

His honor did not reply immediately, but he looked meditatively at Little Hammer before he said quietly,—"Perhaps not, perhaps not."

And Little Hammer, thinking he was expected to speak, drew his blanket up closely about him and grunted, "*How!*"

Pretty Pierre, the notorious half-breed, was then called. He kissed the Book, making the sign of the Cross swiftly as he did so, and unheeding the ironical, if hesitating, laughter in the court. Then he said: "*Bien*, I will tell you the story: the whole truth. I was in the Stony Plains. Little Hammer was 'good Injin' then. . . . Yes, *sacré!* it is a fool who smiles at that. I have kissed the Book. Dam! . . . He would be chief soon when old Two Tails die. He was proud, then, Little Hammer. He go not to the Post for drink; he sell not next year's furs for this year's rations; he shoot straight."

Here Little Hammer stood up and said: "There is too much talk. Let me be. It is all done. The sun is set—I care not—I have killed him"; and then he drew his blanket about his face and sat down.

But Pierre continued: "Yes, you killed him—quick, after five years—that is so; but you will not speak to say why. Then, I will speak. The Injins say Little Hammer will be great man; he will bring the tribes together; and all the time Little Hammer was strong and silent and wise.

Then Brigley the trapper—well, he was a thief and coward. He come to Little Hammer and say: 'I am hungry and tired.' Little Hammer give him food and sleep. He go away. *Bien*, he come back and say,—'It is far to go; I have no horse.' So Little Hammer give him a horse too. Then he come back once again in the night when Little Hammer was away, and before morning he go; but when Little Hammer return, there lay his bride—only an Injin girl, but his bride—dead! You see? Eh? No? Well, the Captain at the Post he says it was the same as Lucrece. —I say it was like hell. It is not much to kill or to die—that is in the game; but that other, *mon Dieu!* Little Hammer, you see how he hide his head: not because he kill the Tarquin, that Brigley, but because he is a poor *vaurien* now, and he once was happy and had a wife. . . . What would you do, judge honorable? . . . Little Hammer, I shake your hand—so!—*How!*"

But Little Hammer made no reply.

The judge sentenced Little Hammer to one month in jail. He might have made it one thousand months—it would have been the same; for when, on the last morning of that month, they opened the door to set him free, he was gone! That is, the Little Hammer whom the high gods knew was gone; though an ill-nourished, self-strangled body was upright by the wall. The vagabond had paid his penalty, but desired no more of earth.

Upon the door was scratched the one word:

How!

VIII

THE HOUSE OPPOSITE

BY

Anthony Hope

The House Opposite [1]

Anthony Hope

WE were talking over the sad case of young Algy Groom; I was explaining to Mrs. Hilary exactly what had happened.

"His father gave him," said I, "a hundred pounds, to keep him for three months in Paris while he learnt French."

"And very liberal too," said Mrs. Hilary.

"It depends where you dine," said I. "However, that question did not arise, for Algy went to the Grand Prix the day after he arrived—"

"A *horse-race?*" asked Mrs. Hilary, with great contempt.

"Certainly the competitors are horses," I rejoined. "And there he, most unfortunately, lost the whole sum, without learning any French to speak of."

"How disgusting!" exclaimed Mrs. Hilary, and little Miss Phyllis gasped in horror.

"Oh, well," said Hilary, with much bravery (as it struck me), "his father's very well off."

"That doesn't make it a bit better," declared his wife.

"There's no mortal sin in a little betting, my dear. Boys will be boys—"

"And even that," I interposed, "wouldn't matter if we could only prevent girls from being girls."

Mrs. Hilary, taking no notice whatever of me, pro-

[1] From *The Dolly Dialogues.* Copyright, 1901, by Robert Howard Russell. Harper & Brothers, publishers.

nounced sentence. "He grossly deceived his father," she said, and took up her embroidery.

"Most of us have grossly deceived our parents before now," said I. "We should all have to confess to something of the sort."

"I hope you're speaking for your own sex," observed Mrs. Hilary.

"Not more than yours," said I. "You used to meet Hilary on the pier when your father wasn't there—you told me so."

"Father had authorized my acquaintance with Hilary."

"I hate quibbles," said I.

There was a pause. Mrs. Hilary stitched: Hilary observed that the day was fine.

"Now," I pursued carelessly, "even Miss Phyllis here has been known to deceive her parents."

"Oh, let the poor child alone, anyhow," said Mrs. Hilary.

"Haven't you?" said I to Miss Phyllis.

I expected an indignant denial. So did Mrs. Hilary, for she remarked with a sympathetic air:

"Never mind his folly, Phyllis dear."

"Haven't you, Miss Phyllis?" said I.

Miss Phyllis grew very red. Fearing that I was causing her pain, I was about to observe on the prospects of a Dissolution when a shy smile spread over Miss Phyllis's face.

"Yes, once," said she, with a timid glance at Mrs. Hilary, who immediately laid down her embroidery.

"Out with it!" I cried triumphantly. "Come along, Miss Phyllis. We won't tell, honor bright!"

Miss Phyllis looked again at Mrs. Hilary. Mrs. Hilary is human.

"Well, Phyllis dear," said she, "after all this time I shouldn't think it my duty—"

"It only happened last summer," said Miss Phyllis.

Mrs. Hilary looked rather put out.

"Still," she began.

"We must have the story," said I.

Little Miss Phyllis put down the sock she had been knitting.

"I was very naughty," she remarked. "It was my last term at school."

"I know that age," said I to Hilary.

"My window looked out toward the street. You're sure you won't tell? Well, there was a house opposite—"

"And a young man in it," said I.

"How did you know that?" asked Miss Phyllis, blushing immensely.

"No girls' school can keep up its numbers without one," I explained.

"Well, there was, anyhow," said Miss Phyllis. "And I and two other girls went to a course of lectures at the Town Hall on literature or something of that kind. We used to have a shilling given us for our tickets."

"Precisely," said I. "A hundred pounds!"

"No, a shilling," corrected Miss Phyllis. "A hundred pounds! How absurd, Mr. Carter! Well, one day I—I—"

"You're sure you wish to go on, Phyllis?" asked Mrs. Hilary.

"You're afraid, Mrs. Hilary," said I, severely.

"Nonsense, Mr. Carter. I thought Phyllis might—"

"I don't mind going on," said Miss Phyllis, smiling. "One day I—I lost the other girls."

"The other girls are always easy to lose," I observed.

"And on the way there,—oh, you know, he went to the lectures."

"The young dog," said I, nudging Hilary. "I should think he did!"

"On the way there it became rather—rather foggy."

"Blessings on it!" I cried; for little Miss Phyllis's demure but roguish expression delighted me.

"And he—he found me in the fog."

"What are you doing, Mr. Carter?" cried Mrs. Hilary, angrily.

"Nothing, nothing," said I. I believe I had winked at Hilary.

"And—and we couldn't find the Town Hall."

"Oh, Phyllis!" groaned Mrs. Hilary.

Little Miss Phyllis looked alarmed for a moment. Then she smiled.

"But we found the confectioner's," said she.

"The *Grand Prix*," said I, pointing my forefinger at Hilary.

"He had no money at all," said Miss Phyllis.

"It's ideal!" said I.

"And—and we had tea on—on—"

"The shilling?" I cried in rapture.

"Yes," said little Miss Phyllis, "on the shilling. And he saw me home."

"Details, please," said I.

Little Miss Phyllis shook her head.

"And left me at the door."

"Was it still foggy?" I asked.

"Yes. Or he wouldn't have—"

"Now what did he—?"

"Come to the door, Mr. Carter," said Miss Phyllis, with obvious wariness. "Oh, it was such fun!"

"I'm sure it was."

"No, I mean when we were examined in the lectures. I bought the local paper, you know, and read it up, and I got top marks easily, and Miss Green wrote to mother to say how well I had done."

"It all ends most satisfactorily," I observed.

"Yes, didn't it?" said little Miss Phyllis.

Mrs. Hilary was grave again.

"And you never told your mother, Phyllis!" she asked.

"N-no, Cousin Mary," said Miss Phyllis.

I rose and stood with my back to the fire. Little Miss Phyllis took up her sock again, but a smile still played about the corners of her mouth.

"I wonder," said I, looking up at the ceiling, "what happened at the door." Then, as no one spoke, I added:

"Pooh! I know what happened at the door."

"I'm not going to tell you anything more," said Miss Phyllis.

"But I should like to hear it in your own—"

Miss Phyllis was gone! She had suddenly risen and run from the room.

"It did happen at the door," said I.

"Fancy Phyllis!" mused Mrs. Hilary.

"I hope," said I, "that it will be a lesson to you."

"I shall have to keep my eye on her," said Mrs. Hilary.

"You can't do it," said I, in easy confidence. I had no fear of little Miss Phyllis being done out of her recreations. "Meanwhile," I pursued, "the important thing is this: my parallel is obvious and complete."

"There's not the least likeness," said Mrs. Hilary, sharply.

"As a hundred pounds are to a shilling, so is the Grand Prix to the young man opposite," I observed, taking my hat, and holding out my hand to Mrs. Hilary.

"I am very angry with you," she said. "You've made the child think there was nothing wrong in it."

"Oh! nonsense," said I. "Look how she enjoyed telling it."

Then, not heeding Mrs. Hilary, I launched into an apostrophe.

"O divine House Opposite!" I cried. "Charming House Opposite! What is a man's own dull uneventful home compared with that Glorious House Opposite! If only I might dwell forever in the House Opposite!"

"I haven't the least notion what you mean," remarked Mrs. Hilary, stiffly. "I suppose it's something silly—or worse."

I looked at her in some puzzle.

"Have you no longing for the House Opposite?" I asked.

Mrs. Hilary looked at me. Her eyes ceased to be absolutely blank. She put her arm through Hilary's and answered gently:

"I don't want the House Opposite."

"Ah," said I, giving my hat a brush, "but maybe you remember the House—when it was Opposite?"

Mrs. Hilary, one arm still in Hilary's, gave me her hand. She blushed and smiled.

"Well," said she, "it was your fault: so I won't scold Phyllis."

"No, don't, my dear," said Hilary, with a laugh.

As for me, I went down-stairs, and, in absence of mind, bade my cabman drive to the House Opposite. But I have never got there.

IX

THE DRAWN BLIND

BY

A. T. Quiller-Couch

The Drawn Blind[1]

A. T. Quiller-Couch

SILVER trumpets sounded a flourish, and the javelin-men came pacing down Tregarrick Fore Street, with the sheriff's coach swinging behind them, its panels splendid with fresh blue paint and florid blazonry. Its wheels were picked out with yellow, and this scheme of color extended to the coachman and the two lackeys, who held on at the back by leathern straps. Each wore a coat and breeches of electric blue, with a canary waistcoat, and was toned off with powder and flesh-colored stockings at the extremities. Within the coach, and facing the horses, sat the two judges of the Crown Court and *Nisi Prius*, both in scarlet, with full wigs and little round patches of black plaster, like ventilators, on top; facing their lordships sat Sir Felix Felix-Williams, the sheriff, in a tightish uniform of the yeomanry with a great shako nodding on his knees, and a chaplain bolt upright by his side. Behind trooped a rabble of loafers and small boys, who shouted, "Who bleeds bran?" till the lackeys' calves itched with indignation.

I was standing in the archway of the Packhorse Inn, among the maids and stable-boys gathered to see the pageant pass on its way to hear the Assize sermon. And standing there, I was witness of a little incident that seemed to escape the rest.

[1] From *The Delectable Duchy*. Copyright, 1898, by Charles Scribner's Sons. By permission of the publishers.

At the moment when the trumpets rang out, a very old woman, in a blue camlet cloak, came hobbling out of a grocer's shop some twenty yards up the pavement, and tottered down ahead of the procession as fast as her decrepit legs would move. There was no occasion for hurrying to avoid the crowd; for the javelin-men had barely rounded the corner of the long street, and were taking the goose-step very seriously and deliberately. But she went by the Packhorse doorway as if swift horsemen were after her, clutching the camlet cloak across her bosom, glancing over her shoulder, and working her lips inaudibly. I could not help remarking the position of her right arm. She held it bent exactly as though she held an infant to her old breast, and shielded it while she ran.

A few paces beyond the inn-door she halted on the edge of the kerb, flung another look up the street, and darted across the roadway. There stood a little shop—a watchmaker's—just opposite, and next to the shop a small ope with one dingy window over it. She vanished up the passage, at the entrance of which I was still staring idly, when, half a minute later, a skinny trembling hand appeared at the window and drew down the blind.

I looked round at the men and maids; but their eyes were all for the pageant, now not a stone's-throw away.

"Who is that old woman?" I asked, touching Caleb, the head ostler, on the shoulder.

Caleb—a small bandy-legged man, with a chin full of furrows, and the furrows full of gray stubble—withdrew his gaze grudgingly from the sheriff's coach.

"What woman?"

"She that went by a moment since."

"She in the blue cloak, d'ee mean?—an old, ancient, wisht-lookin' body?"

"Yes."

"A timmersome woman, like?"

"That's it."

"Well, her name's Cordely Pinsent."

The procession reclaimed his attention. He received a passing wink from the charioteer, caught it on the volley and returned it with a solemn face; or, rather, the wink seemed to rebound as from a blank wall. As the crowd closed in upon the circumstance of Justice, he turned to me again, spat, and went on—

"—Cordely Pinsent, widow of old Key Pinsent, that was tailor to all the grandees in the county so far back as I can mind. She's eighty-odd; eighty-five if a day. I can just mind Key Pinsent—a great, red, rory-cum-tory chap, with a high stock and a wig like King George—'my royal patron' he called 'en, havin' by some means got leave to hoist the king's arms over his door. Such mighty portly manners, too—Oh, very spacious, I assure 'ee! Simme I can see the old Trojan now, with his white weskit bulgin' out across his doorway like a shop-front hung wi' jewels. Gout killed 'en. I went to his buryin'; such a stretch of experience does a young man get by time he reaches my age. God bless your heart alive, *I* can mind when they were hung for forgery!"

"Who were hung?"

"People," he answered vaguely; "and young Willie Pinsent."

"This woman's son?"

"Ay, her son—her ewe-lamb of a child. 'Tis very seldom brought up agen her now, poor soul! She's so very old that folks forgits about it. Do 'ee see her window yonder, over the ope?"

He was pointing across to the soiled white blind that still looked blankly over the street, its lower edge caught up at one corner by a dusty geranium.

"I saw her pull it down."

"Ah, you would if you was lookin' that way. I've a-seed her do 't a score o' times. Well, when the gout reached Key Pinsent's stomach and he went off like the snuff of a candle at the age of forty-two, she was left unprovided, with a son of thirteen to maintain or go 'pon the parish. She was a Menhennick, tho', from t'other side o' the Duchy —a very proud family—and didn't mean to dip the knee to nobody, and all the less because she'd demeaned hersel', to start with, by wedding a tailor. But Key Pinsent by all allowance was handsome as blazes, and well-informed up to a point that he read Shakespeare for the mere pleasure o't.

"Well, she sold up the stock-in-trade an' hired a couple o' rooms—the self-same rooms you see: and then she ate less'n a mouse an' took in needle-work, plain an' fancy: for a lot o' the gentry's wives round the neighborhood befriended her—though they had to be sly an' hide that they meant it for a favor, or she'd ha' snapped their heads off. An' all the while, she was teachin' her boy and tellin' 'en, whatever happened, to remember he was a gentleman, an' lovin' 'en with all the strength of a desolate woman.

"This Willie Pinsent was a comely boy, too: handsome as old Key, an' quick at his books. He'd a bold masterful way, bein' proud as ever his mother was, an' well knowin' there wasn' his match in Tregarrick for head-work. Such a beautiful hand he wrote! When he was barely turned sixteen they gave 'en a place in Gregory's bank—Wilkins an' Gregory it was in those aged times. He still lived home wi' his mother, rentin' a room extra out of his earnin's, and turnin' one of the bedrooms into a parlor. That's the very room you're lookin' at. And when any father in Tregarrick had a bone to pick with his sons, he'd advise 'em to take example by young Pinsent—'so clever and

good, too, there was no tellin' what he mightn't come to in time.'

"Well-a-well, to cut it short, the lad was too clever. It came out, after, that he'd took to bettin' his employers' money agen the rich men up at the Royal Exchange. An' the upshot was that one evenin', while he was drinkin' tea with his mother in his lovin', light-hearted way, in walks a brace o' constables, an' says, 'William Pinsent, young chap, I arrest thee upon a charge o' counterfeitin' old Gregory's handwritin', which is a hangin' matter!'

"An' now, sir, comes the cur'ous part o' the tale; for, if you'll believe *me*, this poor woman wouldn' listen to it—wouldn' hear a word o't. 'What! my son Willie,' she flames, hot as Lucifer—'my son Willie a forger! My boy, that I've nussed, an' reared up, an' studied, markin' all his pretty takin' ways since he learn'd to crawl! Gentlemen,' she says, standin' up an' facin' 'em down, 'what mother knows her son, if not I? I give you my word it's all a mistake.'

"Ay, an' she would have it no other. While her son was waitin' his trial in jail, she walked the streets with her head high, scornin' the folk as she passed. Not a soul dared to speak pity; an' one afternoon, when old Gregory hissel' met her and began to mumble that 'he trusted,' an' 'he had little doubt,' an' 'nobody would be gladder than he if it proved to be a mistake,' she held her skirt aside an' went by with a look that turned 'en to dirt, as he said. 'Gad!' said he, 'she couldn' ha' looked at me worse if I'd been a tab!' meanin' to say 'instead o' the richest man in Tregarrick.'

"But her greatest freak was seen when th' Assizes came. Sir, she wouldn' even go to the trial. She disdained it. An' when, that mornin', the judges had driven by her window, same as they drove to-day, what d'ee think she did?

"She began to lay the cloth up in the parlor yonder, an' there set out the rarest meal, ready for her boy. There was meats, roasted chickens, an' a tongue, an' a great ham. There was cheese-cakes that she made after a little secret of her own; an' a bowl o' junket, an inch deep in cream, that bein' his pet dish; an' all kind o' knick-knacks, wi' grapes an' peaches, an' apricots, an' decanters o' wine, white an' red. Ay, sir, there was even crackers for mother an' son to pull together, with scraps o' poetry inside. An' flowers—the table was bloomin' with flowers. For weeks she'd been plannin' it: an' all the forenoon she moved about an' around that table, givin' it a touch here an' a touch there, an' takin' a step back to see how beautiful it looked. An' then, as the day wore on, she pulled a chair over by the window, an' sat down, an' waited.

"In those days a capital trial was kept up till late into the night, if need were. By-an'-by she called up her little servin' gal that was then (she's a gran'mother now), an' sends her down to the court-house to learn how far the trial had got, an' run back with the news.

"Down runs Selina Mary, an' back with word—

"'They're a-summin'-up,' says she.

"Then Mrs. Pinsent went an' lit eight candles. Four she set 'pon the table, an' four 'pon the mantel-shelf. You could see the blaze out in the street, an' the room lit up, wi' the flowers, an' fruit, an' shinin' glasses—red and yellow dahlias the flowers were, that bein' the time o' year. An' over each candle she put a little red silk shade. You never saw a place look cosier. Then she went back an' waited: but in half an hour calls to Selina Mary agen:

"'Selina Mary, run you back to the court-house, an' bring word how far they've got.'

"So the little slip of a maid ran back, and this time 'twas:

"'Missis, the judge has done; an' now they're consider-in' about Master Willie.'

"So the poor woman sat a while longer, an' then she calls:

"'Selina Mary, run down agen, an' as he comes out, tell 'en to hurry. They must be finished by now.'

"The maid was gone twenty minutes this time. The evenin' was hot an' the window open; an' now all the town that wasn' listenin' to the trial was gathered in front, gazin' cur'ously at the woman inside. She was tittivatin' the table for the fiftieth time, an' touchin' up the flowers that had drooped a bit i' the bowls.

"But after twenty minutes Selina Mary came runnin' up the street, an' fetched her breath at the front door, and went up-stairs slowly and 'pon tiptoe. Her face at the parlor door was white as paper; an' while she stood there the voices o' the crowd outside began to take all one tone, and beat into the room like the sound o' waves 'pon a beach.

"'Oh, missis—' she begins.

"'Have they finished?'

"The poor cheald was only able to nod.

"'Then, where's Willie? Why isn't he here?'

"'Oh, missis, they're goin' to hang 'en!'

"Mrs. Pinsent moved across the room, took her by the arm, led her down-stairs, an' gave her a little push out into the street. Not a word did she say, but shut the door 'pon her, very gentle-like. Then she went back an' pulled the blind down slowly. The crowd outside watched her do it. Her manner was quite ord'nary. They stood there for a minute or so, an' behind the blind the eight candles went out, one by one. By the time the judges passed homeward 'twas all dark, only the blind showin' white by the street-lamp opposite. From that year to this she has pulled it down whenever a judge drives by."

X

THE EXILES

BY

Richard Harding Davis

The Exiles[1]

Richard Harding Davis

I

THE greatest number of people in the world prefer the most highly civilized places of the world, because they know what sort of things are going to happen there, and because they also know by experience that those are the sort of things they like. A very few people prefer barbarous and utterly uncivilized portions of the globe for the reason that they receive while there new impressions, and because they like the unexpected better than a routine of existence, no matter how pleasant that routine may be. But the most interesting places of all to study are those in which the savage and the cultivated man lie down together and try to live together in unity. This is so because we can learn from such places just how far a man of cultivation lapses into barbarism when he associates with savages, and how far the remnants of his former civilization will have influence upon the barbarians among whom he has come to live.

There are many such colonies as these, and they are the most picturesque plague-spots on the globe. You will find them in New Zealand and at Yokohama, in Algiers, Tunis, and Tangier, and scattered thickly all along the South

[1] From *The Exiles and Other Stories*. Copyright, 1894, by Harper & Brothers.

American coast-line wherever the law of extradition obtains not, and where public opinion, which is one of the things a colony can do longest without, is unknown. These are the unofficial Botany Bays and Melillas of the world, where the criminal goes of his own accord, and not because his government has urged him to do so and paid his passage there.

This is the story of a young man who went to such a place for the benefit he hoped it would be to his health, and not because he had robbed any one or done a young girl an injury. He was the only son of Judge Henry Howard Holcombe, of New York. That was all that it was generally considered necessary to say of him. It was not, however, quite enough, for, while his father had had nothing but the right and the good of his State and country to think about, the son was further occupied by trying to live up to his father's name. Young Holcombe was impressed by this fact from his earliest childhood. It rested upon him while at Harvard and during his years at the law school, and it went with him into society and into the courts of law. When he rose to plead a case he did not forget, nor did those present forget, that his father while alive had crowded those same halls with silent, earnest listeners; and when he addressed a mass-meeting at Cooper Union, or spoke from the back of a cart in the East Side, some one was sure to refer to the fact that this last speaker was the son of the man who was mobbed because he had dared to be an abolitionist, and who later had received the veneration of a great city for his bitter fight against Tweed and his followers.

Young Holcombe was an earnest member of every reform club and citizen's league, and his distinguished name gave weight as a director to charitable organizations and free kindergartens. He had inherited his hatred of Tam-

many Hall, and was unrelenting in his war upon it and its handiwork, and he spoke of it and of its immediate downfall with the bated breath of one who, though amazed at the wickedness of the thing he fights, is not discouraged nor afraid. And he would listen to no half-measures. Had not his grandfather quarrelled with Henry Clay, and so shaken the friendship of a lifetime, because of a great compromise which he could not countenance? And was his grandson to truckle and make deals with this hideous octopus that was sucking the life-blood from the city's veins? Had he not but yesterday distributed six hundred circulars, calling for honest government, to six hundred possible voters, all the way up Fourth Avenue?—and when some flippant one had said that he might have hired a messenger-boy to have done it for him and so saved his energies for something less mechanical, he had rebuked the speaker with a reproachful stare and turned away in silence.

Life was terribly earnest to young Holcombe, and he regarded it from the point of view of one who looks down upon it from the judge's bench, and listens with a frown to those who plead its cause. He was not fooled by it: he was alive to its wickedness and its evasions. He would tell you that he knew for a fact that the window man in his district was a cousin of the Tammany candidate, and that the contractor who had the cleaning of the streets to do was a brother-in-law of one of the Hall's sachems, and that the policeman on his beat had not been in the country eight months. He spoke of these damning facts with the air of one who simply tells you that much, that you should see how terrible the whole thing really was, and what he could tell if he wished.

In his own profession he recognized the trials of law-breakers only as experiments, which went to establish and

explain a general principle. And prisoners were not men to him, but merely the exceptions that proved the excellence of a rule. Holcombe would defend the lowest creature or the most outrageous of murderers, not because the man was a human being fighting for his liberty or life, but because he wished to see if certain evidence would be admitted in the trial of such a case. Of one of his clients the judge, who had a daughter of his own, said, when he sentenced him, "Were there many more such men as you in the world, the women of this land would pray to God to be left childless." And when some one asked Holcombe, with ill-concealed disgust, how he came to defend the man, he replied: "I wished to show the unreliability of expert testimony from medical men. Yes; they tell me the man was a very bad lot."

It was measures, not men, to Holcombe, and law and order were his twin goddesses, and "no compromise" his watchword.

"You can elect your man if you'll give me two thousand dollars to refit our club-room with," one of his political acquaintances once said to him. "We've five hundred voters on the rolls now, and the members vote as one man. You'd be saving the city twenty times that much if you keep Croker's man out of the job. You know *that* as well as I do."

"The city can better afford to lose twenty thousand dollars," Holcombe answered, "than we can afford to give a two-cent stamp for corruption."

"All right," said the heeler; "all right, Mr. Holcombe. Go on. Fight 'em your own way. If they'd agree to fight you with pamphlets and circulars you'd stand a chance, sir; but as long as they give out money and you give out reading-matter to people that can't read, they'll win, and I naturally want to be on the winning side."

When the club to which Holcombe belonged finally succeeded in getting the Police Commissioners indicted for blackmailing gambling-houses, Holcombe was, as a matter of course and of public congratulation, on the side of the law; and as Assistant District Attorney—a position given him on account of his father's name and in the hope that it would shut his mouth—distinguished himself nobly.

Of the four commissioners, three were convicted—the fourth, Patrick Meakim, with admirable foresight having fled to that country from which few criminals return, and which is vaguely set forth in the newspapers as "parts unknown."

The trial had been a severe one upon the zealous Mr. Holcombe, who found himself at the end of it in a very bad way, with nerves unstrung and brain so fagged that he assented without question when his doctor exiled him from New York by ordering a sea voyage, with change of environment and rest at the other end of it. Some one else suggested the northern coast of Africa and Tangier, and Holcombe wrote minute directions to the secretaries of all of his reform clubs urging continued efforts on the part of his fellow-workers, and sailed away one cold winter's morning for Gibraltar. The great sea laid its hold upon him, and the winds from the south thawed the cold in his bones, and the sun cheered his tired spirit. He stretched himself at full length reading those books which one puts off reading until illness gives one the right to do so, and so far as in him lay obeyed his doctor's first command, that he should forget New York and all that pertained to it. By the time he had reached the Rock he was up and ready to drift farther into the lazy irresponsible life of the Mediterranean coast, and he had forgotten his struggles against municipal misrule, and was at times for hours together utterly oblivious of his own personality.

A dumpy, fat little steamer rolled itself along like a sailor on shore from Gibraltar to Tangier, and Holcombe, leaning over the rail of its quarter-deck, smiled down at the chattering group of Arabs and Moors stretched on their rugs beneath him. A half-naked negro, pulling at the dates in the basket between his bare legs, held up a handful to him with a laugh, and Holcombe laughed back and emptied the cigarettes in his case on top of him, and laughed again as the ship's crew and the deck passengers scrambled over one another and shook out their voluminous robes in search of them. He felt at ease with the world and with himself, and turned his eyes to the white walls of Tangier with a pleasure so complete that it shut out even the thought that it was a pleasure.

The town seemed one continuous mass of white stucco, with each flat low-lying roof so close to the other that the narrow streets left no trace. To the left of it the yellow coast-line and the green olive-trees and palms stretched up against the sky, and beneath him scores of shrieking blacks fought in their boats for a place beside the steamer's companionway. He jumped into one of these open wherries and fell sprawling among his baggage, and laughed lightly as a boy as the boatman set him on his feet again, and then threw them from under him with a quick stroke of the oars. The high, narrow pier was crowded with excited customs officers in ragged uniforms and dirty turbans, and with a few foreign residents looking for arriving passengers. Holcombe had his feet on the upper steps of the ladder, and was ascending slowly. There was a fat, heavily built man in blue serge leaning across the railing of the pier. He was looking down, and as his eyes met Holcombe's face his own straightened into lines of amazement and most evident terror. Holcombe stopped at the sight, and stared back wondering. And then the lapping

waters beneath him and the white town at his side faded away, and he was back in the hot, crowded court-room with this man's face before him. Meakim, the fourth of the Police Commissioners, confronted him, and saw in his presence nothing but a menace to himself.

Holcombe came up the last steps of the stairs, and stopped at their top. His instinct and life's tradition made him despise the man, and to this was added the selfish disgust that his holiday should have been so soon robbed of its character by this reminder of all that he had been told to put behind him.

Meakim swept off his hat as though it were hurting him, and showed the great drops of sweat on his forehead.

"For God's sake!" the man panted, "you can't touch me here, Mr. Holcombe. I'm safe here; they told me I'd be. You can't take me. You can't touch me."

Holcombe stared at the man coldly, and with a touch of pity and contempt. "That is quite right, Mr. Meakim," he said. "The law cannot reach you here."

"Then what do you want with me?" the man demanded, forgetful in his terror of anything but his own safety.

Holcombe turned upon him sharply. "I am not here on your account, Mr. Meakim," he said. "You need not feel the least uneasiness, and," he added, dropping his voice as he noticed that others were drawing near, "if you keep out of my way, I shall certainly keep out of yours."

The Police Commissioner gave a short laugh, partly of bravado and partly at his own sudden terror. "I didn't know," he said, breathing with relief. "I thought you'd come after me. You don't wonder you give me a turn, do you? I *was* scared." He fanned himself with his straw hat, and ran his tongue over his lips. "Going to be here some time, Mr. District Attorney?" he added, with grave politeness.

Holcombe could not help but smile at the absurdity of it. It was so like what he would have expected of Meakim and his class to give every office-holder his full title. "No, Mr. Police Commissioner," he answered, grimly, and, nodding to his boatmen, pushed his way after them and his trunks along the pier.

Meakim was waiting for him as he left the custom-house. He touched his hat, and bent the whole upper part of his fat body in an awkward bow. "Excuse me, Mr. District Attorney," he began.

"Oh, drop that, will you?" snapped Holcombe. "Now, what is it you want, Meakim?"

"I was only going to say," answered the fugitive, with some offended dignity, "that as I've been here longer than you, I could perhaps give you pointers about the hotels. I've tried 'em all, and they're no good, but the Albion's the best."

"Thank you, I'm sure," said Holcombe. "But I have been told to go to the Isabella."

"Well, that's pretty good, too," Meakim answered, "if you don't mind the tables. They keep you awake most of the night, though, and—"

"The tables? I beg your pardon," said Holcombe, stiffly.

"Not the eatin' tables; the roulette tables," corrected Meakim. "Of course," he continued, grinning, "if you're fond of the game, Mr. Holcombe, it's handy having them in the same house, but I can steer you against a better one back of the French Consulate. Those at the Hôtel Isabella's crooked."

Holcombe stopped uncertainly. "I don't know just what to do," he said. "I think I shall wait until I can see our consul here."

"Oh, he'll send you to the Isabella," said Meakim, cheer-

fully. "He gets two hundred dollars a week for protecting the proprietor, so he naturally caps for the house."

Holcombe opened his mouth to express himself, but closed it again, and then asked, with some misgivings, of the hotel of which Meakim had first spoken.

"Oh, the Albion. Most all the swells go there. It's English, and they cook you a good beefsteak. And the boys generally drop in for table d'hôte. You see, that's the worst of this place, Mr. Holcombe; there's nowhere to go evenings—no club-rooms nor theatre nor nothing; only the smoking-room of the hotel or that gambling-house; and they spring a double nought on you if there's more than a dollar up."

Holcombe still stood irresolute, his porters eying him from under their burdens, and the runners from the different hotels plucking at his sleeve.

"There's some very good people at the Albion," urged the Police Commissioner, "and three or four of 'em's New-Yorkers. There's the Morrises and Ropes, the Consul-General, and Lloyd Carroll—"

"Lloyd Carroll!" exclaimed Holcombe.

"Yes," said Meakim, with a smile, "he's here." He looked at Holcombe curiously for a moment, and then exclaimed, with a laugh of intelligence: "Why, sure enough, you were Mr. Thatcher's lawyer in that case, weren't you? It was you got him his divorce?"

Holcombe nodded.

"Carroll was the man that made it possible, wasn't he?"

Holcombe chafed under this catechism. "He was one of a dozen, I believe," he said; but as he moved away he turned and asked: "And Mrs. Thatcher. What has become of her?"

The Police Commissioner did not answer at once, but glanced up at Holcombe from under his half-shut eyes

with a look in which there was a mixture of curiosity and of amusement. "You don't mean to say, Mr. Holcombe," he began, slowly, with the patronage of the older man and with a touch of remonstrance in his tone, "that you're *still* with the husband in that case?"

Holcombe looked coldly over Mr. Meakim's head. "I have only a purely professional interest in any one of them," he said. "They struck me as a particularly nasty lot. Good-morning, sir."

"Well," Meakim called after him, "you needn't see nothing of them if you don't want to. You can get rooms to yourself."

Holcombe did get rooms to himself, with a balcony overlooking the bay, and arranged with the proprietor of the Albion to have his dinner served at a separate table. As others had done this before, no one regarded it as an affront upon his society, and several people in the hotel made advances to him, which he received politely but coldly. For the first week of his visit the town interested him greatly, increasing its hold upon him unconsciously to himself. He was restless and curious to see it all, and rushed his guide from one of the few show-places to the next with an energy which left that fat Oriental panting.

But after three days Holcombe climbed the streets more leisurely, stopping for half-hours at a time before a bazaar, or sent away his guide altogether, and stretched himself luxuriously on the broad wall of the fortifications. The sun beat down upon him, and wrapped him into drowsiness. From far afield came the unceasing murmur of the market-place and the bazaars, and the occasional cries of the priests from the minarets; the dark-blue sea danced and flashed beyond the white margin of the town and its protecting reef of rocks where the seaweed rose and fell, and above his head the buzzards swept heavily, and called

to one another with harsh, frightened cries. At his side lay the dusty road, hemmed in by walls of cactus, and along its narrow length came lines of patient little donkeys with jangling necklaces, led by wild-looking men from the farm-lands and the desert, and women muffled and shapeless, with only their bare feet showing, who looked at him curiously or meaningly from over the protecting cloth, and passed on, leaving him startled and wondering. He began to find that the books he had brought wearied him. The sight of the type alone was enough to make him close the covers and start up restlessly to look for something less absorbing. He found this on every hand, in the lazy patience of the bazaars and of the markets, where the chief service of all was that of only standing and waiting, and in the farm-lands behind Tangier, where half-naked slaves drove great horned buffalo, and turned back the soft, chocolate-colored sod with a wooden plough. But it was a solitary, selfish holiday, and Holcombe found himself wanting certain ones at home to bear him company, and was surprised to find that of these none were the men nor the women with whom his interests in the city of New York were the most closely connected. They were rather foolish people, men at whom he had laughed and whom he had rather pitied for having made him do so, and women he had looked at distantly as of a kind he might understand when his work was over and he wished to be amused. The young girls to whom he was in the habit of pouring out his denunciations of evil, and from whom he was accustomed to receive advice and moral support, he could not place in this landscape. He felt uneasily that they would not allow him to enjoy it his own way; they would consider the Moor historically as the invader of Catholic Europe, and would be shocked at the lack of proper sanitation, and would see the mud. As for himself, he had risen

above seeing the mud. He looked up now at the broken line of the roof-tops against the blue sky, and when a hooded figure drew back from his glance he found himself murmuring the words of an Eastern song he had read in a book of Indian stories:

> "Alone upon the housetops, to the north
> I turn and watch the lightning in the sky,—
> The glamour of thy footsteps in the north.
> Come back to me, Beloved, or I die!
>
> "Below my feet the still bazaar is laid.
> Far, far below, the weary camels lie—"

Holcombe laughed and shrugged his shoulders. He had stopped half-way down the hill on which stands the Bashaw's palace, and the whole of Tangier lay below him like a great cemetery of white marble. The moon was shining clearly over the town and the sea, and a soft wind from the sandy farm-lands came to him and played about him like the fragrance of a garden. Something moved in him that he did not recognize, but which was strangely pleasant, and which ran to his brain like the taste of a strong liqueur. It came to him that he was alone among strangers, and that what he did now would be known but to himself and to these strangers. What it was that he wished to do he did not know, but he felt a sudden lifting up and freedom from restraint. The spirit of adventure awoke in him and tugged at his sleeve, and he was conscious of a desire to gratify it and to put it to the test.

"'Alone upon the housetops,'" he began. Then he laughed and clambered hurriedly down the steep hillside. "It's the moonlight," he explained to the blank walls and overhanging lattices, "and the place and the music of the song. It might be one of the Arabian nights, and I Haroun

al Raschid. *And* if I don't get back to the hotel I shall make a fool of myself."

He reached the Albion very warm and breathless, with stumbling and groping in the dark, and instead of going immediately to bed told the waiter to bring him some cool drink out on the terrace of the smoking-room. There were two men sitting there in the moonlight, and as he came forward one of them nodded to him silently.

"Oh, good-evening, Mr. Meakim!" Holcombe said, gayly, with the spirit of the night still upon him. "I've been having adventures." He laughed, and stooped to brush the dirt from his knickerbockers and stockings. "I went up to the palace to see the town by moonlight, and tried to find my way back alone, and fell down three times."

Meakim shook his head gravely. "You'd better be careful at night, sir," he said. "The governor has just said that the Sultan won't be responsible for the lives of foreigners at night 'unless accompanied by soldier and lantern.' "

"Yes, and the legations sent word that they wouldn't have it," broke in the other man. "They said they'd hold him responsible anyway."

There was a silence, and Meakim moved in some slight uneasiness. "Mr. Holcombe, do you know Mr. Carroll?" he said.

Carroll half rose from his chair, but Holcombe was dragging another toward him, and so did not have a hand to give him.

"How are you, Carroll?" he said, pleasantly.

The night was warm, and Holcombe was tired after his rambles, and so he sank back in the low wicker chair contentedly enough, and when the first cool drink was finished he clapped his hands for another, and then another, while the two men sat at the table beside him and avoided such topics as would be unfair to any of them.

"And yet," said Holcombe, after the first half-hour had passed, "there must be a few agreeable people here. I am sure I saw some very nice-looking women to-day coming in from the fox-hunt. And very well gotten up, too, in Karki habits. And the men were handsome, decent-looking chaps—Englishmen, I think."

"Who does he mean? Were you at the meet to-day?" asked Carroll.

The Tammany chieftain said no, that he did not ride—not after foxes, in any event. "But I saw Mrs. Hornby and her sister coming back," he said. "They had on those linen habits."

"Well, now, there's a woman who illustrates just what I have been saying," continued Carroll. "You picked her out as a self-respecting, nice-looking girl—and so she is—but she wouldn't like to have to tell all she knows. No, they are all pretty much alike. They wear low-neck frocks, and the men put on evening dress for dinner, and they ride after foxes, and they drop in to five-o'clock tea, and they all play that they're a lot of gilded saints, and it's one of the rules of the game that you must believe in the next man, so that he will believe in you. I'm breaking the rules myself now, because I say 'they' when I ought to say 'we.' We're none of us here for our health, Holcombe, but it pleases us to pretend we are. It's a sort of give and take. We all sit around at dinner-parties and smile and chatter, and those English talk about the latest news from 'town,' and how they mean to run back for the season or the hunting. But they know they don't dare go back, and they know that everybody at the table knows it, and that the servants behind them know it. But it's more easy that way. There's only a few of us here, and we've got to hang together or we'd go crazy."

"That's so," said Meakim, approvingly. "It makes it more sociable."

"It's a funny place," continued Carroll. The wine had loosened his tongue, and it was something to him to be able to talk to one of his own people again, and to speak from their point of view, so that the man who had gone through St. Paul's and Harvard with him would see it as such a man should. "It's a funny place, because, in spite of the fact that it's a prison, you grow to like it for its freedom. You can do things here you can't do in New York, and pretty much everything goes there, or it used to, where I hung out. But here you're just your own master, and there's no law and no religion and no relations nor newspapers to poke into what you do nor how you live. You can understand what I mean if you've ever tried living in the West. I used to feel the same way the year I was ranching in Texas. My family sent me out there to put me out of temptation; but I concluded I'd rather drink myself to death on good whiskey at Del's than on the stuff we got on the range, so I pulled my freight and came East again. But while I was there I was a little king. I was just as good as the next man, and he was no better than me. And though the life was rough, and it was cold and lonely, there was something in being your own boss that made you stick it out there longer than anything else did. It was like this, Holcombe." Carroll half rose from his chair and marked what he said with his finger. "Every time I took a step and my gun bumped against my hip, I'd straighten up and feel good and look for trouble. There was nobody to appeal to; it was just between me and him, and no one else had any say about it. Well, that's what it's like here. You see men come to Tangier on the run, flying from detectives or husbands or bank directors, men who have lived perfectly decent,

commonplace lives up to the time they made their one bad break—which," Carroll added, in polite parenthesis, with a deprecatory wave of his hand toward Meakim and himself, "we are *all* likely to do some time, aren't we?"

"Just so," said Meakim.

"Of course," assented the District Attorney.

"But as soon as he reaches this place, Holcombe," continued Carroll, "he begins to show just how bad he is. It all comes out—all his viciousness and rottenness and blackguardism. There is nothing to shame it, and there is no one to blame him, and no one is in a position to throw the first stone." Carroll dropped his voice and pulled his chair forward with a glance over his shoulder. "One of those men you saw riding in from the meet to-day. Now, he's a German officer, and he's here for forging a note or cheating at cards, or something quiet and gentlemanly, nothing that shows him to be a brute or a beast. But last week he had old Mulley Wazzam buy him a slave girl in Fez, and bring her out to his house in the suburbs. It seems that the girl was in love with a soldier in the Sultan's body-guard at Fez, and tried to run away to join him, and this man met her quite by accident as she was making her way south across the sand-hills. He was whip that day, and was hurrying out to the meet alone. He had some words with the girl first, and then took his whip—it was one of those with the long lash to it; you know what I mean—and cut her to pieces with it, riding her down on his pony when she tried to run, and heading her off and lashing her around the legs and body until she fell; then he rode on in his damn pink coat to join the ladies at Mango's Drift, where the meet was, and some Riffs found her bleeding to death behind the sand-hills. That man held a commission in the Emperor's own body-guard, and that's what Tangier did for *him*."

Holcombe glanced at Meakim to see if he would verify this, but Meakim's lips were tightly pressed around his cigar, and his eyes were half closed.

"And what was done about it?" Holcombe asked, hoarsely.

Carroll laughed, and shrugged his shoulders. "Why, I tell you, and you whisper it to the next man, and we pretend not to believe it, and call the Riffs liars. As I say, we're none of us here for our health, Holcombe, and a public opinion that's manufactured by *déclassée* women and men who have run off with somebody else's money and somebody else's wife isn't strong enough to try a man for beating his own slave."

"But the Moors themselves?" protested Holcombe. "And the Sultan? She's one of his subjects, isn't she?"

"She's a woman, and women don't count for much in the East, you know; and as for the Sultan, he's an ignorant black savage. When the English wanted to blow up those rocks off the western coast, the Sultan wouldn't let them. He said Allah had placed them there for some good reason of His own, and it was not for man to interfere with the works of God. That's the sort of a Sultan he is." Carroll rose suddenly and walked into the smoking-room, leaving the two men looking at each other in silence.

"That's right," said Meakim, after a pause. "He gave it to you just as it is, but I never knew him to kick about it before. We're a fair field for missionary work, Mr. Holcombe, all of us—at least, some of us are." He glanced up as Carroll came back from out of the lighted room with an alert, brisk step. His manner had changed in his absence.

"Some of the ladies have come over for a bit of supper," he said. "Mrs. Hornby and her sister and Captain Reese. The *chef's* got some birds for us, and I've put a couple of

bottles on ice. It will be like Del's—hey? A small hot bird and a large cold bottle. They sent me out to ask you to join us. They're in our rooms." Meakim rose leisurely and lit a fresh cigar, but Holcombe moved uneasily in his chair. "You'll come, won't you?" Carroll asked. "I'd like you to meet my wife."

Holcombe rose irresolutely and looked at his watch. "I'm afraid it's too late for me," he said, without raising his face. "You see, I'm here for my health. I—"

"I beg your pardon," said Carroll, sharply.

"Nonsense, Carroll!" said Holcombe. "I didn't mean *that*. I meant it literally. I can't risk midnight suppers yet. My doctor's orders are to go to bed at nine, and it's past twelve now. Some other time, if you'll be so good; but it's long after my bedtime, and—"

"Oh, certainly," said Carroll, quietly, as he turned away. "Are you coming, Meakim?"

Meakim lifted his half-empty glass from the table and tasted it slowly until Carroll had left them, then he put the glass down, and glanced aside to where Holcombe sat looking out over the silent city. Holcombe raised his eyes and stared at him steadily.

"Mr. Holcombe—" the fugitive began.

"Yes," replied the lawyer.

Meakim shook his head. "Nothing," he said. "Good-night, sir."

Holcombe's rooms were on the floor above Carroll's, and the laughter of the latter's guests and the tinkling of glasses and silver came to him as he stepped out upon his balcony. But for this the night was very still. The sea beat leisurely on the rocks, and the waves ran up the sandy coast with a sound as of some one sweeping. The music of women's laughter came up to him suddenly, and he wondered hotly if they were laughing at him. He assured

himself that it was a matter of indifference to him if they were. And with this he had a wish that they would not think of him as holding himself aloof. One of the women began to sing to a guitar, and to the accompaniment of this a man and a young girl came out upon the balcony below, and spoke to each other in low, earnest tones, which seemed to carry with them the feeling of a caress. Holcombe could not hear what they said, but he could see the curve of the woman's white shoulders and the light of her companion's cigar as he leaned upon the rail with his back to the moonlight and looked into her face. Holcombe felt a sudden touch of loneliness and of being very far from home. He shivered slightly as though from the cold, and stepping inside closed the window gently behind him.

Although Holcombe met Carroll several times during the following day, the latter obviously avoided him, and it was not until late in the afternoon that Holcombe was given a chance to speak to him again. Carroll was coming down the only street on a run, jumping from one rough stone to another, and with his face lighted up with excitement. He hailed Holcombe from a distance with a wave of the hand. "There's an American man-of-war in the bay," he cried; "one of the new ones. We saw her flag from the hotel. Come on!" Holcombe followed as a matter of course, as Carroll evidently expected that he would, and they reached the end of the landing-pier together, just as the ship of war ran up and broke the square red flag of Morocco from her mainmast and fired her salute.

"They'll be sending a boat in by-and-by," said Carroll, "and we'll have a talk with the men." His enthusiasm touched his companion also, and the sight of the floating atom of the great country that was his moved him strongly, as though it were a personal message from home. It came

to him like the familiar stamp, and a familiar handwriting on a letter in a far-away land, and made him feel how dear his own country was to him and how much he needed it. They were leaning side by side upon the rail watching the ship's screws turning the blue waters white, and the men running about the deck, and the blue-coated figures on the bridge. Holcombe turned to point out the vessel's name to Carroll, and found that his companion's eyes were half closed and filled with tears.

Carroll laughed consciously and coughed. "We kept it up a bit too late last night," he said, "and I'm feeling nervous this morning, and the sight of the flag and those boys from home knocked me out." He paused for a moment, frowning through his tears and with his brow drawn up into many wrinkles. "It's a terrible thing, Holcombe," he began again, fiercely, "to be shut off from all of that." He threw out his hand with a sudden gesture toward the man-of-war. Holcombe looked down at the water and laid his hand lightly on his companion's shoulder. Carroll drew away and shook his head. "I don't want any sympathy," he said, kindly. "I'm not crying the baby act. But you don't know, and I don't believe anybody else knows, what I've gone through and what I've suffered. You don't like me, Holcombe, and you don't like my class, but I want to tell you something about my coming here. I want you to set them right about it at home. And I don't care whether it interests you or not," he said, with quick offence; "I want you to listen. It's about my wife."

Holcombe bowed his head gravely.

"You got Thatcher his divorce," Carroll continued. "And you know that he would never have got it but for me, and that everybody expected that I would marry Mrs. Thatcher when the thing was over. And I didn't, and

everybody said I was a blackguard, and I was. It was bad enough before, but I made it worse by not doing the only thing that could make it any better. Why I didn't do it I don't know. I had some grand ideas of reform about that time, I think, and I thought I owed my people something, and that by not making Mrs. Thatcher my mother's daughter I would be saving her and my sisters. It was remorse, I guess, and I didn't see things straight. I know now what I should have done. Well, I left her and she went her own way, and a great many people felt sorry for her, and were good to her—not your people, nor my people; but enough were good to her to make her see as much of the world as she had used to. She never loved Thatcher, and she never loved any of the men you brought into that trial except one, and he treated her like a cur. That was myself. Well, what with trying to please my family, and loving Alice Thatcher all the time and not seeing her, and hating her too for bringing me into all that notoriety—for I blamed the woman, of course, as a man always will—I got to drinking, and then this scrape came and I had to run. I don't care anything about that row now, or what you believe about it. I'm here, shut off from my home, and that's a worse punishment than any damn lawyers can invent. And the man's well again. He saw I was drunk; but I wasn't so drunk that I didn't know he was trying to do me, and I pounded him just as they say I did, and I'm sorry now I didn't kill him."

Holcombe stirred uneasily, and the man at his side lowered his voice and went on more calmly:

"If I hadn't been a gentleman, Holcombe, or if it had been another cabman he'd fought with, there wouldn't have been any trouble about it. But he thought he could get big money out of me, and his friends told him to press it until he was paid to pull out, and I hadn't the money,

and so I had to break bail and run. Well, you've seen the place. You've been here long enough to know what it's like, and what I've had to go through. Nobody wrote me, and nobody came to see me; not one of my own sisters even, though they've been in the Riviera all this spring—not a day's journey away. Sometimes a man turned up that I knew, but it was almost worse than not seeing any one. It only made me more homesick when he'd gone. And for weeks I used to walk up and down that beach there alone late in the night, until I got to thinking that the waves were talking to me, and I got queer in my head. I had to fight it just as I used to have to fight against whiskey, and to talk fast so that I wouldn't think. And I tried to kill myself hunting, and only got a broken collar-bone for my pains. Well, all this time Alice was living in Paris and New York. I heard that some English captain was going to marry her, and then I read in the Paris *Herald* that she was settled in the American colony there, and one day it gave a list of the people who'd been to a reception she gave. She could go where she pleased, and she had money in her own right, you know; and she was being revenged on me every day. And I was here knowing it, and loving her worse than I ever loved anything on earth, and having lost the right to tell her so, and not able to go to her. Then one day some chap turned up from here and told her about me, and about how miserable I was, and how well I was being punished. He thought it would please her, I suppose. I don't know who he was, but I guess he was in love with her himself. And then the papers had it that I was down with the fever here, and she read about it. I *was* ill for a time, and I hoped it was going to carry me off decently, but I got up in a week or two, and one day I crawled down here where we're standing now to watch the boat come in. I was pretty weak from my illness, and

I was bluer than I had ever been, and I didn't see anything but blackness and bitterness for me anywhere. I turned around when the passengers reached the pier, and I saw a woman coming up those stairs. Her figure and her shoulders were so like Alice's that my heart went right up into my throat, and I couldn't breathe for it. I just stood still staring, and when she reached the top of the steps she looked up, breathing with the climb, and laughing; and she says, 'Lloyd, I've come to see you.' And I—I was that lonely and weak that I grabbed her hand, and leaned back against the railing, and cried there before the whole of them. I don't think she expected it exactly, because she didn't know what to do, and just patted me on the shoulder, and said, 'I thought I'd run down to cheer you up a bit; and I've brought Mrs. Scott with me to chaperone us.' And I said, without stopping to think: 'You wouldn't have needed any chaperone, Alice, if I hadn't been a cur and a fool. If I had only asked what I can't ask of you now'; and, Holcombe, she flushed just like a little girl, and laughed, and said, 'Oh, will you, Lloyd?' And you see that ugly iron chapel up there, with the corrugated zinc roof and the wooden cross on it, next to the mosque? Well, that's where we went first, right from this wharf before I let her go to a hotel, and old Ridley, the English rector, he married us, and we had a civil marriage too. That's what she did for me. She had the whole wide globe to live in, and she gave it up to come to Tangier, because I had no other place but Tangier, and she's made my life for me, and I'm happier here than I ever was before anywhere, and sometimes I think—I hope—that she is, too." Carroll's lips moved slightly, and his hands trembled on the rail. He coughed, and his voice was gentler when he spoke again. "And so," he added, "that's why I felt it last night when you refused to meet her.

You were right, I know, from your way of thinking, but we've grown careless down here, and we look at things differently."

Holcombe did not speak, but put his arm across the other's shoulder, and this time Carroll did not shake it off. Holcombe pointed with his hand to a tall, handsome woman with heavy yellow hair who was coming toward them, with her hands in the pockets of her reefer. "There is Mrs. Carroll now," he said. "Won't you present me, and then we can row out and see the man-of-war?"

II

The officers returned their visit during the day, and the American Consul-General asked them all to a reception the following afternoon. The entire colony came to this, and Holcombe met many people, and drank tea with several ladies in riding-habits, and iced drinks with all of the men. He found it very amusing, and the situation appealed strongly to his somewhat latent sense of humor. That evening in writing to his sister he told of his rapid recovery in health, and of the possibility of his returning to civilization.

"There was a reception this afternoon at the Consul-General's," he wrote, "given to the officers of our man-of-war, and I found myself in some rather remarkable company. The consul himself has become rich by selling his protection for two hundred dollars to every wealthy Moor who wishes to escape the forced loans which the Sultan is in the habit of imposing on the faithful. For five hundred dollars he will furnish any one of them with a piece of stamped paper accrediting him as minister plenipotentiary from the United States to the Sultan's court. Of course the Sultan never receives them, and whatever

object they may have had in taking the long journey to Fez is never accomplished. Some day some one of them will find out how he has been tricked, and will return to have the consul assassinated. This will be a serious loss to our diplomatic service. The consul's wife is a fat German woman who formerly kept a hotel here. Her brother has it now, and runs it as an annex to a gambling-house. Pat Meakim, the police commissioner that I indicted, but who jumped his bail, introduced me at the reception to the men, with apparently great self-satisfaction, as 'the pride of the New York Bar,' and Mrs. Carroll, for whose husband I obtained a divorce, showed her gratitude by presenting me to the ladies. It was a distinctly Gilbertian situation, and the people to whom they introduced me were quite as picturesquely disreputable as themselves. So you see—"

Holcombe stopped here and read over what he had written, and then tore up the letter. The one he sent in its place said he was getting better, but that the climate was not so mild as he had expected it would be.

Holcombe engaged the entire first floor of the hotel the next day, and entertained the officers and the residents at breakfast, and the Admiral made a speech and said how grateful it was to him and to his officers to find that wherever they might touch, there were some few Americans ready to welcome them as the representatives of the flag they all so unselfishly loved, and of the land they still so proudly called "home." Carroll, turning his wine-glass slowly between his fingers, raised his eyes to catch Holcombe's, and winked at him from behind the curtain of the smoke of his cigar, and Holcombe smiled grimly, and winked back, with the result that Meakim, who had intercepted the signalling, choked on his champagne, and had to be pounded violently on the back. Holcombe's break-

fast established him as a man of means and one who could entertain properly, and after that his society was counted upon for every hour of the day. He offered money as prizes for the ship's crew to row and swim after, he gave a purse for a cross-country pony-race, open to members of the Calpe and Tangier hunts, and organized picnics and riding parties innumerable. He was forced at last to hire a soldier to drive away the beggars when he walked abroad. He found it easy to be rich in a place where he was giving over two hundred copper coins for an English shilling, and he distributed his largesses recklessly and with a lack of discrimination entirely opposed to the precepts of his organized charities at home. He found it so much more amusing to throw a handful of coppers to a crowd of fat naked children than to write a check for the Society of Suppression of Cruelty to the same beneficiaries.

"You shouldn't give those fellows money," the Consul-General once remonstrated with him; "the fact that they're blind is only a proof that they have been thieves. When they catch a man stealing here they hold his head back, and pass a hot iron in front of his eyes. That's why the lids are drawn taut that way. You shouldn't encourage them."

"Perhaps they're not *all* thieves," said the District Attorney, cheerfully, as he hit the circle around him with a handful of coppers; "but there is no doubt about it that they're all blind. Which is the more to be pitied," he asked the Consul-General, "the man who has still to be found out and who can see, or the one who has been exposed and who is blind?"

"How should he know?" said Carroll, laughing. "He's never been blind, and he still holds his job."

"I don't think that's very funny," said the Consul-General.

A week of pig-sticking came to end Holcombe's stay in Tangier, and he threw himself into it and into the freedom of its life with a zest that made even the Englishman speak of him as a good fellow. He chanced to overhear this, and stopped to consider what it meant. No one had ever called him a good fellow at home, but then his life had not offered him the chance to show what sort of a good fellow he might be, and as Judge Holcombe's son certain things had been debarred him. Here he was only the richest tourist since Farwell, the diamond smuggler from Amsterdam, had touched there in his yacht.

The week of boar-hunting was spent out-of-doors, on horseback, and in tents; the women in two wide circular ones, and the men in another, with a mess tent, which they shared in common, pitched between them. They had only one change of clothes each, one wet and one dry, and they were in the saddle from nine in the morning until late at night, when they gathered in a wide circle around the wood-fire and played banjoes and listened to stories. Holcombe grew as red as a sailor, and jumped his horse over gaping crevasses in the hard sun-baked earth as recklessly as though there were nothing in this world so well worth sacrificing one's life for as to be the first in at a dumb brute's death. He was on friendly terms with them all now—with Miss Terrill, the young girl who had been awakened by night and told to leave Monte Carlo before daybreak, and with Mrs. Darhah, who would answer to Lady Taunton, if so addressed, and with Andrews, the Scotch bank clerk, and Ollid, the boy officer from Gibraltar, who had found some difficulty in making the mess account balance. They were all his very good friends, and he was especially courteous and attentive to Miss Terrill's wants and interests, and fixed her stirrup and once let her pass him to charge the boar in his place. She was a silently

distant young woman, and strangely gentle for one who had had to leave a place, and such a place, between days; and her hair, which was very fine and light, ran away from under her white helmet in disconnected curls. At night, Holcombe used to watch her from out of the shadow when the firelight lit up the circle and the tips of the palms above them, and when the story-teller's voice was accompanied by bursts of occasional laughter from the dragomen in the grove beyond, and the stamping and neighing of the horses at their pickets, and the unceasing chorus of the insect life about them. She used to sit on one of the rugs with her hands clasped about her knees, and with her head resting on Mrs. Hornby's broad shoulder, looking down into the embers of the fire, and with the story of her life written on her girl's face as irrevocably as though old age had set its seal there. Holcombe was kind to them all now, even to Meakim, when that gentleman rode leisurely out to the camp with the mail and the latest Paris *Herald*, which was their one bond of union with the great outside world.

Carroll sat smoking his pipe one night, and bending forward over the fire to get its light on the pages of the latest copy of this paper. Suddenly he dropped it between his knees. "I say, Holcombe," he cried, "here's news! Winthrop Allen has absconded with three hundred thousand dollars, and no one knows where."

Holcombe was sitting on the other side of the fire, prying at the rowel of his spur with a hunting-knife. He raised his head and laughed. "Another good man gone wrong, hey?" he said.

Carroll lowered the paper slowly to his knee and stared curiously through the smoky light to where Holcombe sat intent on the rowel of his spur. It apparently absorbed his entire attention, and his last remark had been an un-

consciously natural one. Carroll smiled grimly as he folded the paper across his knee. "Now are the mighty fallen, indeed," he murmured. He told Meakim of it a few minutes later, and they both marvelled. "It's just as I told him, isn't it, and he wouldn't believe me. It's the place and the people. Two weeks ago he would have raged. Why, Meakim, you know Allen—Winthrop Allen? He's one of Holcombe's own sort; older than he is, but one of his own people; belongs to the same clubs; and to the same family, I think, and yet Harry took it just as a matter of course, with no more interest than if I'd said that Allen was going to be married."

Meakim gave a low, comfortable laugh of content. "It makes me smile," he chuckled, "every time I think of him the day he came up them stairs. He scared me half to death, he did, and then he says, just as stiff as you please, 'If you'll leave me alone, Mr. Meakim, I'll not trouble you.' And now it's 'Meakim this,' and 'Meakim that,' and 'Have a drink, Meakim,' just as thick as thieves. I have to laugh whenever I think of it now. 'If you'll leave me alone, I'll not trouble you, Mr. Meakim.'"

Carroll pursed his lips and looked up at the broad expanse of purple heavens with the white stars shining through. "It's rather a pity, too, in a way," he said, slowly. "He was all the Public Opinion we had, and now that he's thrown up the part, why—"

The pig-sticking came to an end finally, and Holcombe distinguished himself by taking his first fall, and under romantic circumstances. He was in an open place, with Mrs. Carroll at the edge of the brush to his right, and Miss Terrill guarding any approach from the left. They were too far apart to speak to one another, and sat quite still and alert to any noise as the beaters closed in around them. There was a sharp rustle in the reeds, and the

boar broke out of it some hundred feet ahead of Holcombe. He went after it at a gallop, headed it off, and ran it fairly on his spear point as it came toward him; but as he drew his lance clear his horse came down, falling across him, and for the instant knocking him breathless. It was all over in a moment. He raised his head to see the boar turn and charge him; he saw where his spear point had torn the lower lip from the long tusks, and that the blood was pouring down its flanks. He tried to draw out his legs, but the pony lay fairly across him, kicking and struggling, and held him in a vise. So he closed his eyes and covered his head with his arms, and crouched in a heap waiting. There was the quick beat of a pony's hoofs on the hard soil, and the rush of the boar within a foot of his head, and when he looked up he saw Miss Terrill twisting her pony's head around to charge the boar again, and heard her shout "Let me have him!" to Mrs. Carroll.

Mrs. Carroll came toward Holcombe with her spear pointed dangerously high; she stopped at his side and drew in her rein sharply. "Why don't you get up? are you hurt?" she said. "Wait; lie still," she commanded, "or he'll tramp on you. I'll get him off." She slipped from her saddle and dragged Holcombe's pony to his feet. Holcombe stood up unsteadily, pale through his tan from the pain of the fall and the moment of fear.

"That *was* nasty," said Mrs. Carroll, with a quick breath. She was quite as pale as he.

Holcombe wiped the dirt from his hair and the side of his face, and looked past her to where Miss Terrill was surveying the dead boar from her saddle, while her pony reared and shied, quivering with excitement beneath her. Holcombe mounted stiffly and rode toward her. "I am very much obliged to you," he said. "If you hadn't come—"

The girl laughed shortly, and shook her head without looking at him. "Why, not at all," she interrupted, quickly. "I would have come just as fast if you hadn't been there." She turned in her saddle and looked at him frankly. "I was glad to see you go down," she said, "for it gave me the first good chance I've had. Are you hurt?"

Holcombe drew himself up stiffly, regardless of the pain in his neck and shoulder. "No, I'm all right, thank you," he answered. "At the same time," he called after her as she moved away to meet the others, "you *did* save me from being torn up, whether you like it or not."

Mrs. Carroll was looking after the girl with observant, comprehending eyes. She turned to Holcombe with a smile. "There are a few things you have still to learn, Mr. Holcombe," she said, bowing in her saddle mockingly, and dropping the point of her spear to him as an adversary does in salute. "And perhaps," she added, "it is just as well that there are."

Holcombe trotted after her in some concern. "I wonder what she means?" he said. "I wonder if I was rude?"

The pig-sticking ended with a long luncheon before the ride back to town, at which everything that could be eaten or drunk was put on the table, in order, as Meakim explained, that there would be less to carry back. He met Holcombe that same evening after the cavalcade had reached Tangier as the latter came down the stairs of the Albion. Holcombe was in fresh raiment and cleanly shaven, and with the radiant air of one who had had his first comfortable bath in a week.

Meakim confronted him with a smiling countenance. "Who do you think come to-night on the mail-boat?" he asked.

"I don't know. Who?"

"Winthrop Allen, with six trunks," said Meakim, with the triumphant air of one who brings important news.

"No, really now," said Holcombe, laughing. "The old hypocrite! I wonder what he'll say when he sees me. I wish I could stay over another boat, just to remind him of the last time we met. What a fraud he is! It was at the club, and he was congratulating me on my noble efforts in the cause of justice, and all that sort of thing. He said I was a public benefactor. And at that time he must have already speculated away about half of what he had stolen of other people's money. I'd like to tease him about it."

"What trial was that?" asked Meakim.

Holcombe laughed and shook his head as he moved on down the stairs. "Don't ask embarrassing questions, Meakim," he said. "It was one *you* won't forget in a hurry."

"Oh!" said Meakim, with a grin. "All right. There's some mail for you in the office."

"Thank you," said Holcombe.

A few hours later Carroll was watching the roulette wheel in the gambling-hall of the Isabella when he saw Meakim come in out of the darkness, and stand staring in the doorway, blinking at the lights and mopping his face. He had been running, and was visibly excited. Carroll crossed over to him and pushed him out into the quiet of the terrace. "What is it?" he asked.

"Have you seen Holcombe?" Meakim demanded in reply.

"Not since this afternoon. Why?"

Meakim breathed heavily, and fanned himself with his hat. "Well, he's after Winthrop Allen, that's all," he panted. "And when he finds him there's going to be a muss. The boy's gone crazy. He's not safe."

"Why? What do you mean? What's Allen done to him?"

"Nothing to him, but to a friend of his. He got a letter to-night in the mail that came with Allen. It was from his sister. She wrote him all the latest news about Allen, and give him fits for robbing an old lady who's been kind to her. She wanted that Holcombe should come right back and see what could be done about it. She didn't know, of course, that Allen was coming here. The old lady kept a private school on Fifth Avenue, and Allen had charge of her savings."

"What is her name?" Carroll asked.

"Field, I think. Martha Field was—"

"The dirty blackguard!" cried Carroll. He turned sharply away and returned again to seize Meakim's arm. "Go on," he demanded. "What did she say?"

"You know her too, do you?" said Meakim, shaking his head sympathetically. "Well, that's all. She used to teach his sister. She seems to be a sort of fashionable—"

"I know," said Carroll, roughly. "She taught my sister. She teaches everybody's sister. She's the sweetest, simplest old soul that ever lived. Holcombe's dead right to be angry. She almost lived at their house when his sister was ill."

"Tut! you don't say?" commented Meakim, gravely. "Well, his sister's pretty near crazy about it. He give me the letter to read. It got me all stirred up. It was just writ in blood. She must be a fine girl, his sister. She says this Miss Martha's money was the last thing Allen took. He didn't use her stuff to speculate with, but cashed it in just before he sailed and took it with him for spending-money. His sister says she's too proud to take help, and she's too old to work."

"How much did he take?"

"Sixty thousand. She'd been saving for over forty years."

Carroll's mind took a sudden turn. "And Holcombe?" he demanded, eagerly. "What is he going to do? Nothing silly, I hope."

"Well, that's just it. That's why I come to find you," Meakim answered, uneasily. "I don't want him to qualify for no Criminal Stakes. I got no reason to love him either— But you know—" he ended, impotently.

"Yes, I understand," said Carroll. "That's what I meant. Confound the boy, why didn't he stay in his law courts! What did he say?"

"Oh, he just raged around. He said he'd tell Allen there was an extradition treaty that Allen didn't know about, and that if Allen didn't give him the sixty thousand he'd put it in force and make him go back and stand trial."

"Compounding a felony, is he?"

"No, nothing of the sort," said Meakim, indignantly. "There isn't any extradition treaty, so he wouldn't be doing anything wrong except lying a bit."

"Well, it's blackmail, anyway."

"What, blackmail a man like Allen? Huh! He's fair game, if there ever was any. But it won't work with him, that's what I'm afraid of. He's too cunning to be taken in by it, he is. He had good legal advice before he came here, or he wouldn't have come."

Carroll was pacing up and down the terrace. He stopped and spoke over his shoulder. "Does Holcombe think Allen has the money with him?" he asked.

"Yes, he's sure of it. That's what makes him so keen. He says Allen wouldn't dare bank it at Gibraltar, because if he ever went over there to draw on it he would get caught, so he must have brought it with him here. And

he got here so late that Holcombe believes it's in Allen's rooms now, and he's like a dog that smells a rat, after it. Allen wasn't in when he went up to his room, and he's started out hunting for him, and if he don't find him I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he broke into the room and just took it."

"For God's sake!" cried Carroll. "He wouldn't do that?"

Meakim pulled and fingered at his heavy watch-chain and laughed doubtfully. "I don't know," he said. "He wouldn't have done it three months ago, but he's picked up a great deal since then—since he has been with us. He's asking for Captain Reese, too."

"What's he want with that blackguard?"

"I don't know; he didn't tell me."

"Come," said Carroll, quickly. "We must stop him." He ran lightly down the steps of the terrace to the beach, with Meakim waddling heavily after him. "He's got too much at stake, Meakim," he said, in half apology, as they tramped through the sand. "He mustn't spoil it. We won't let him."

Holcombe had searched the circuit of Tangier's small extent with fruitless effort, his anger increasing momentarily and feeding on each fresh disappointment. When he had failed to find the man he sought in any place, he returned to the hotel and pushed open the door of the smoking-room as fiercely as though he meant to take those within by surprise.

"Has Mr. Allen returned?" he demanded. "Or Captain Reese?" The attendant thought not, but he would go and see. "No," Holcombe said, "I will look for myself." He sprang up the stairs to the third floor, and turned down a passage to a door at its farthest end. Here he stopped, and knocked gently. "Reese!" he called;

"Reese!" There was no response to his summons, and he knocked again, with more impatience, and then cautiously turned the handle of the door, and, pushing it forward, stepped into the room. "Reese," he said, softly, "it's Holcombe. Are you here?" The room was dark except for the light from the hall, which shone dimly past him and fell upon a gun-rack hanging on the wall opposite. Holcombe hurried toward this and ran his hands over it, and passed on quickly from that to the mantel and the tables, stumbling over chairs and riding-boots as he groped about, and tripping on the skin of some animal that lay stretched upon the floor. He felt his way around the entire circuit of the room, and halted near the door with an exclamation of disappointment. By this time his eyes had become accustomed to the darkness, and he noted the white surface of the bed in a far corner and ran quickly toward it, groping with his hands about the posts at its head. He closed his fingers with a quick gasp of satisfaction on a leather belt that hung from it, heavy with cartridges and a revolver that swung from its holder. Holcombe pulled this out and jerked back the lever, spinning the cylinder around under the edge of his thumb. He felt the grease of each cartridge as it passed under his nail. The revolver was loaded in each chamber, and Holcombe slipped it into the pocket of his coat and crept out of the room, closing the door softly behind him. He met no one in the hall or on the stairs, and passed on quickly to a room on the second floor. There was a light in this room which showed through the transom and under the crack at the floor, and there was a sound of some one moving about within. Holcombe knocked gently and waited.

The movement on the other side of the door ceased, and after a pause a voice asked who was there. Holcombe

hesitated a second before answering, and then said, "It is a servant, sir, with a note for Mr. Allen."

At the sound of some one moving toward the door from within, Holcombe threw his shoulder against the panel and pressed forward. There was the click of the key turning in the lock and of the withdrawal of a bolt, and the door was partly opened. Holcombe pushed it back with his shoulder, and, stepping quickly inside, closed it again behind him.

The man within, into whose presence he had forced himself, confronted him with a look of some alarm, which increased in surprise as he recognized his visitor. "Why, Holcombe!" he exclaimed. He looked past him as though expecting some one else to follow. "I thought it was a servant," he said.

Holcombe made no answer, but surveyed the other closely, and with a smile of content. The man before him was of erect carriage, with white hair and whiskers, cut after an English fashion which left the mouth and chin clean shaven. He was of severe and dignified appearance, and though standing as he was in dishabille still gave in his bearing the look of an elderly gentleman who had lived a self-respecting, well-cared-for, and well-ordered life. The room about him was littered with the contents of opened trunks and uncorded boxes. He had been interrupted in the task of unpacking and arranging these possessions, but he stepped unresentfully toward the bed where his coat lay, and pulled it on, feeling at the open collar of his shirt, and giving a glance of apology toward the disorder of the apartment.

"The night was so warm," he said, in explanation. "I have been trying to get things to rights. I—" He was speaking in some obvious embarrassment, and looked uncertainly toward the intruder for help. But Holcombe

made no explanation, and gave him no greeting. "I heard in the hotel that you were here," the other continued, still striving to cover up the difficulty of the situation, "and I am sorry to hear that you are going so soon." He stopped, and as Holcombe still continued smiling, drew himself up stiffly. The look on his face hardened into one of offended dignity.

"Really, Mr. Holcombe," he said, sharply, and with strong annoyance in his tone, "if you have forced yourself into this room for no other purpose than to stand there and laugh, I must ask you to leave it. You may not be conscious of it, but your manner is offensive." He turned impatiently to the table, and began rearranging the papers upon it. Holcombe shifted the weight of his body as it rested against the door from one shoulder-blade to the other and closed his hands over the door-knob behind him.

"I had a letter to-night from home about you, Allen," he began, comfortably. "The person who wrote it was anxious that I should return to New York, and set things working in the District Attorney's office in order to bring you back. It isn't you they want so much as—"

"How dare you?" cried the embezzler, sternly, in the voice with which one might interrupt another in words of shocking blasphemy.

"How dare I what?" asked Holcombe.

"How dare you refer to my misfortune? You of all others—" He stopped, and looked at his visitor with flashing eyes. "I thought you a gentleman," he said, reproachfully; "I thought you a man of the world, a man who in spite of your office, official position, or, rather, on account of it, could feel and understand the—a—terrible position in which I am placed, and that you would show consideration. Instead of which," he cried, his voice rising

in indignation, "you have come apparently to mock at me. If the instinct of a gentleman does not teach you to be silent, I shall have to force you to respect my feelings. You can leave the room, sir. Now, at once." He pointed with his arm at the door against which Holcombe was leaning, the fingers of his outstretched hand trembling visibly.

"Nonsense. Your misfortune! What rot!" Holcombe growled resentfully. His eyes wandered around the room as though looking for some one who might enjoy the situation with him, and then returned to Allen's face. "You mustn't talk like that to me," he said, in serious remonstrance. "A man who has robbed people who trusted him for three years, as you have done, can't afford to talk of his misfortune. You were too long about it, Allen. You had too many chances to put it back. *You've* no feelings to be hurt. Besides, if you have, I'm in a hurry, and I've not the time to consider them. Now, what I want of you is—"

"Mr. Holcombe," interrupted the other, earnestly.

"Sir," replied the visitor.

"Mr. Holcombe," began Allen, slowly, and with impressive gravity, "I do not want any words with you about this, or with any one else. I am here owing to a combination of circumstances which have led me through hopeless, endless trouble. What I have gone through with nobody knows. That is something no one but I can ever understand. But that is now at an end. I have taken refuge in flight and safety, where another might have remained and compromised and suffered; but I am a weaker brother, and—as for punishment, my own conscience, which has punished me so terribly in the past, will continue to do so in the future. I am greatly to be pitied, Mr. Holcombe, greatly to be pitied. And no one knows that better than

yourself. You know the value of the position I held in New York City, and how well I was suited to it, and it to me. And now I am robbed of it all. I am an exile in this wilderness. Surely, Mr. Holcombe, this is not the place nor the time when you should insult me by recalling the—"

"You contemptible hypocrite," said Holcombe, slowly. "What an ass you must think I am! Now, listen to me."

"No, *you* listen to me," thundered the other. He stepped menacingly forward, his chest heaving under his open shirt, and his fingers opening and closing at his side. "Leave the room, I tell you," he cried, "or I shall call the servants and make you!" He paused with a short, mocking laugh. "Who do you think I am?" he asked; "a child that you can insult and jibe at? I'm not a prisoner in the box for you to browbeat and bully, Mr. District Attorney. You seem to forget that I am out of your jurisdiction now."

He waited, and his manner seemed to invite Holcombe to make some angry answer to his tone, but the young man remained grimly silent.

"You are a very important young person at home, Harry," Allen went on, mockingly. "But New York State laws do not reach as far as Africa."

"Quite right; that's it exactly," said Holcombe, with cheerful alacrity. "I'm glad you have grasped the situation so soon. That makes it easier for me. Now, what I have been trying to tell you is this. I received a letter about you to-night. It seems that before leaving New York you converted bonds and mortgages belonging to Miss Martha Field, which she had intrusted to you, into ready money. And that you took this money with you. Now, as this is the first place you have stopped since leaving New York, except Gibraltar, where you could not have banked it, you must have it with you now, here in this town, in this hotel, possibly in this room. What else you

have belonging to other poor devils and corporations does not concern me. It's yours as far as I mean to do anything about it. But this sixty thousand dollars which belongs to Miss Field, who is the best, purest, and kindest woman I have ever known, and who has given away more money than you ever stole, is going back with me tomorrow to New York." Holcombe leaned forward as he spoke, and rapped with his knuckles on the table. Allen confronted him in amazement, in which there was not so much surprise at what the other threatened to do as at the fact that it was he who had proposed doing it.

"I don't understand," he said, slowly, with the air of a bewildered child.

"It's plain enough," replied the other, impatiently. "I tell you I want sixty thousand dollars of the money you have with you. You can understand that, can't you?"

"But how?" expostulated Allen. "You don't mean to rob me, do you, Harry?" he asked, with a laugh.

"You're a very stupid person for so clever a one," Holcombe said, impatiently. "You must give me sixty thousand dollars—and if you don't, I'll take it. Come, now, where is it—in that box?" He pointed with his finger toward a square travelling-case covered with black leather that stood open on the table filled with papers and blue envelopes.

"Take it!" exclaimed Allen. "You, Henry Holcombe? Is it you who are speaking? Do I hear you?" He looked at Holcombe with eyes full of genuine wonder and a touch of fear. As he spoke his hand reached out mechanically and drew the leather-bound box toward him.

"Ah, it is in that box, then," said Holcombe, in a quiet, grave tone. "Now count it out, and be quick."

"Are you drunk?" cried the other, fiercely. "Do you propose to turn highwayman and thief? What do you

mean?" Holcombe reached quickly across the table toward the box, but the other drew it back, snapping the lid down, and hugging it close against his breast. "If you move, Holcombe," he cried, in a voice of terror and warning, "I'll call the people of the house and—and expose you."

"Expose me, you idiot," returned Holcombe, fiercely. "How dare *you* talk to *me* like that!"

Allen dragged the table more evenly between them, as a general works on his defences even while he parleys with the enemy. "It's you who are the idiot!" he cried. "Suppose you could overcome me, which would be harder than you think, what are you going to do with the money? Do you suppose I'd let you leave this country with it? Do you imagine for a moment that I would give it up without raising my hand? I'd have you dragged to prison from your bed this very night, or I'd have you seized as you set your foot upon the wharf. I would appeal to our Consul-General. As far as he knows, I am as worthy of protection as you are yourself, and, failing him, I'd appeal to the law of the land." He stopped for want of breath, and then began again with the air of one who finds encouragement in the sound of his own voice. "They may not understand extradition here, Holcombe," he said, "but a thief is a thief all the world over. What you may be in New York isn't going to help you here; neither is your father's name. To these people you would be only a hotel thief who forces his way into other men's rooms at night and—"

"You poor thing," interrupted Holcombe. "Do you know where you are?" he demanded. "You talk, Allen, as though we were within sound of the cable-cars on Broadway. This hotel is not the Brunswick, and this Consul-General you speak of is another blackguard who

knows that a word from me at Washington, on my return, or a letter from here would lose him his place and his liberty. He's as much of a rascal as any of them, and he knows that I know it and that I may use that knowledge. *He* won't help you. And as for the law of the land"—Holcombe's voice rose and broke in a mocking laugh—"there is no law of the land. *That's why you're here!* You are in a place populated by exiles and outlaws like yourself, who have preyed upon society until society has turned and frightened each of them off like a dog with his tail between his legs. Don't give yourself confidence, Allen. That's all you are, that's all we are—two dogs fighting for a stolen bone. The man who rules you here is an ignorant negro, debauched and vicious and a fanatic. He is shut off from every one, even to the approach of a British ambassador. And what do you suppose he cares for a dog of a Christian like you, who has been robbed in a hotel by another Christian? And these others. Do you suppose they care? Call out—cry for help, and tell them that you have half a million dollars in this room, and they will fall on you and strip you of every cent of it, and leave you to walk the beach for work. Now, what are you going to do? Will you give me the money I want to take back where it belongs, or will you call for help and lose it all?"

The two men confronted each other across the narrow length of the table. The blood had run to Holcombe's face, but the face of the other was drawn and pale with fear.

"You can't frighten me," he gasped, rallying his courage with an effort of the will. "You are talking nonsense. This is a respectable hotel; it isn't a den of thieves. You are trying to frighten me out of the money with your lies and your lawyer's tricks, but you will find that I am not so easily fooled. You are dealing with a man, Holcombe,

who suffered to get what he has, and who doesn't mean to let it go without a fight for it. Come near me, I warn you, and I shall call for help."

Holcombe backed slowly away from the table and tossed up his hands with the gesture of one who gives up his argument. "You will have it, will you?" he muttered, grimly. "Very well, you *shall* fight for it." He turned quickly and drove in the bolt of the door and placed his shoulders over the electric button in the wall. "I have warned you," he said, softly. "I have told you where you are, and that you have nothing to expect from the outside. You are absolutely in my power to do with as I please." He stopped, and, without moving his eyes from Allen's face, drew the revolver from the pocket of his coat. His manner was so terrible that Allen gazed at him, breathing faintly, and with his eyes fixed in horrible fascination. "There is no law," Holcombe repeated, softly. "There is no help for you now or later. It is a question of two men locked in a room with a table and sixty thousand dollars between them. That is the situation. Two men and sixty thousand dollars. We have returned to first principles, Allen. It is a man against a man, and there is no Court of Appeal."

Allen's breath came back to him with a gasp, as though he had been shocked with a sudden downpour of icy water.

"There is!" he cried. "There *is* a Court of Appeal. For God's sake, wait. I appeal to Henry Holcombe, to Judge Holcombe's son. I appeal to your good name, Harry, to your fame in the world. Think what you are doing; for the love of God, don't murder me. I'm a criminal, I know, but not what you would be, Holcombe; not that. You are mad or drunk. You wouldn't, you couldn't do it. Think of it! *You*, Henry Holcombe. *You*."

The fingers of Holcombe's hand moved and tightened

around the butt of the pistol, the sweat sprang from the pores of his palm. He raised the revolver and pointed it. "My sin's on my own head," he said. "Give me the money."

The older man glanced fearfully back of him at the open window, through which a sea breeze moved the palms outside, so that they seemed to whisper together as though aghast at the scene before them. The window was three stories from the ground, and Allen's eyes returned to the stern face of the younger man. As they stood silent there came to them the sound of some one moving in the hall, and of men's voices whispering together. Allen's face lit with a sudden radiance of hope, and Holcombe's arm moved uncertainly.

"I fancy," he said, in a whisper, "that those are my friends. They have some idea of my purpose, and they have come to learn more. If you call, I will let them in, and they will strangle you into silence until I get the money."

The two men eyed each other steadily, the older seeming to weigh the possible truth of Holcombe's last words in his mind. Holcombe broke the silence in a lighter tone.

"Playing the policeman is a new rôle to me," he said, "and I warn you that I have but little patience; and, besides, my hand is getting tired, and this thing is at full cock."

Allen, for the first time, lowered the box upon the table and drew from it a bundle of notes bound together with elastic bandages. Holcombe's eyes lighted as brightly at the sight as though the notes were for his own private pleasures in the future.

"Be quick!" he said. "I cannot be responsible for the men outside."

Allen bent over the money, his face drawing into closer

and sharper lines as the amount grew, under his fingers, to the sum Holcombe had demanded.

"Sixty thousand!" he said, in a voice of desperate calm.

"Good!" whispered Holcombe. "Pass it over to me. I hope I have taken the most of what you have," he said, as he shoved the notes into his pocket; "but this is something. Now I warn you," he added, as he lowered the trigger of the revolver and put it out of sight, "that any attempt to regain this will be futile. I am surrounded by friends; no one knows you or cares about you. I shall sleep in my room to-night without precaution, for I know that the money is now mine. Nothing you can do will recall it. Your cue is silence and secrecy as to what you have lost and as to what you still have with you."

He stopped in some confusion, interrupted by a sharp knock at the door and two voices calling his name. Allen shrank back in terror.

"You coward!" he hissed. "You promised me you'd be content with what you have." Holcombe looked at him in amazement. "And now your accomplices are to have their share, too, are they?" the embezzler whispered, fiercely. "You lied to me; you mean to take it all."

Holcombe, for an answer, drew back the bolt, but so softly that the sound of his voice drowned the noise it made.

"No, not to-night," he said, briskly, so that the sound of his voice penetrated into the hall beyond. "I mustn't stop any longer, I'm keeping you up. It has been very pleasant to have heard all that news from home. It was such a chance, my seeing you before I sailed. Good-night." He paused and pretended to listen. "No, Allen, I don't think it's a servant," he said. "It's some of my friends looking for me. This is my last night on shore, you see." He threw open the door and confronted Meakim and Car-

roll as they stood in some confusion in the dark hall. "Yes, it is some of my friends," Holcombe continued. "I'll be with you in a minute," he said to them. Then he turned, and, crossing the room in their sight, shook Allen by the hand, and bade him good-night and good-bye.

The embezzler's revulsion of feeling was so keen and the relief so great that he was able to smile as Holcombe turned and left him. "I wish you a pleasant voyage," he said, faintly.

Then Holcombe shut the door on him, closing him out from their sight. He placed his hands on a shoulder of each of the two men, and jumped step by step down the stairs like a boy as they descended silently in front of him. At the foot of the stairs Carroll turned and confronted him sternly, staring him in the face. Meakim at one side eyed him curiously.

"Well?" said Carroll, with one hand upon Holcombe's wrist.

Holcombe shook his hand free, laughing. "Well," he answered, "I persuaded him to make restitution."

"You persuaded him!" exclaimed Carroll, impatiently. "How?"

Holcombe's eyes avoided those of the two inquisitors. He drew a long breath, and then burst into a loud fit of hysterical laughter. The two men surveyed him grimly. "I argued with him, of course," said Holcombe, gayly. "That is my business, man; you forget that I am a District Attorney—"

"*We* didn't forget it," said Carroll, fiercely. "Did *you?* What did you do?"

Holcombe backed away up the stairs, shaking his head and laughing. "I shall never tell you," he said. He pointed with his hand down the second flight of stairs. "Meet me in the smoking-room," he continued. "I will

be there in a minute, and we will have a banquet. Ask the others to come. I have something to do first."

The two men turned reluctantly away, and continued on down the stairs without speaking and with their faces filled with doubt. Holcombe ran first to Reese's room and replaced the pistol in its holder. He was trembling as he threw the thing from him, and had barely reached his own room and closed the door when a sudden faintness overcame him. The weight he had laid on his nerves was gone and the laughter had departed from his face. He stood looking back at what he had escaped as a man reprieved at the steps of the gallows turns his head to glance at the rope he has cheated. Holcombe tossed the bundle of notes upon the table and took an unsteady step across the room. Then he turned suddenly and threw himself upon his knees and buried his face in the pillow.

The sun rose the next morning on a cool, beautiful day, and the consul's boat, with the American flag trailing from the stern, rose and fell on the bluest waters as it carried Holcombe and his friends to the steamer's side.

"We are going to miss you very much," Mrs. Carroll said. "I hope you won't forget to send us word of yourself."

Miss Terrill said nothing. She was leaning over the side trailing her hand in the water, and watching it run between her slim pink fingers. She raised her eyes to find Holcombe looking at her intently with a strange expression of wistfulness and pity, at which she smiled brightly back at him, and began to plan vivaciously with Captain Reese for a ride that same afternoon.

They separated over the steamer's deck, and Meakim, for the hundredth time, and in the lack of conversation which comes at such moments, offered Holcombe a fresh cigar.

"But I have got eight of yours now," said Holcombe.

"That's all right; put it in your pocket," said the Tammany chieftain, "and smoke it after dinner. You'll need 'em. They're better than those you'll get on the steamer, and they never went through a custom-house."

Holcombe cleared his throat in some slight embarrassment. "Is there anything I can do for you in New York, Meakim?" he asked. "Anybody I can see, or to whom I can deliver a message?"

"No," said Meakim. "I write pretty often. Don't you worry about me," he added, gratefully. "I'll be back there some day myself, when the law of limitation lets me."

Holcombe laughed. "Well," he said, "I'd be glad to do something for you if you'd let me know what you'd like."

Meakim put his hands behind his back and puffed meditatively on his cigar, rolling it between his lips with his tongue. Then he turned it between his fingers and tossed the ashes over the side of the boat. He gave a little sigh, and then frowned at having done so. "I'll tell you what you *can* do for me, Holcombe," he said, smiling. "Some night I wish you would go down to Fourteenth Street, some night this spring, when the boys are sitting out on the steps in front of the Hall, and just take a drink for me at Ed Lally's; just for luck. Will you? That's what I'd like to do. I don't know nothing better than Fourteenth Street of a summer evening, with all the people crowding into Pastor's on one side of the Hall, and the Third Avenue L cars running by on the other. That's a gay sight; ain't it now? With all the girls coming in and out of Theiss's, and the sidewalks crowded. One of them warm nights when they have to have the windows open, and you can hear the music in at Pastor's, and the audience clapping their hands. That's great, isn't it? Well," he laughed and shook his head, "I'll be back there some day, won't I," he said, wistfully, "and hear it for myself."

"Carroll," said Holcombe, drawing the former to one side, "suppose I see this cabman when I reach home, and get him to withdraw the charge, or agree not to turn up when it comes to trial."

Carroll's face clouded in an instant. "Now, listen to me, Holcombe," he said. "You let my dirty work alone. There's lots of my friends who have nothing better to do than just that. You have something better to do, and you leave me and my rows to others. I like you for what you are, and not for what you can do for me. I don't mean that I don't appreciate your offer, but it shouldn't have come from an Assistant District Attorney to a fugitive criminal."

"What nonsense!" said Holcombe.

"Don't say that; don't say that!" said Carroll, quickly, as though it hurt him. "You wouldn't have said it a month ago."

Holcombe eyed the other with an alert, confident smile. "No, Carroll," he answered, "I would not." He put his hand on the other's shoulder with a suggestion in his manner of his former self, and with a touch of patronage. "I have learned a great deal in a month," he said. "Seven battles were won in seven days once. All my life I have been fighting causes, Carroll, and principles. I have been working with laws against law-breakers. I have never yet fought a man. It was not poor old Meakim, the individual, I prosecuted, but the corrupt politician. Now, here I have been thrown with men and women on as equal terms as a crew of sailors cast away upon a desert island. We were each a law unto himself. And I have been brought face to face, and for the first time in my life, not with principles of conduct, not with causes, and not with laws, but with my fellow-men."

XI

THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING

BY

Rudyard Kipling

The Man Who Would Be King

Rudyard Kipling

"Brother to a Prince and fellow to a beggar if he be found worthy."

THE law, as quoted, lays down a fair conduct of life, and one not easy to follow. I have been fellow to a beggar again and again under circumstances which prevented either of us finding out whether the other was worthy. I have still to be brother to a Prince, though I once came near to kinship with what might have been a veritable King and was promised the reversion of a Kingdom—army, law-courts, revenue and policy all complete. But, to-day, I greatly fear that my King is dead, and if I want a crown I must go and hunt it for myself.

The beginning of everything was in a railway train upon the road to Mhow from Ajmir. There had been a Deficit in the Budget, which necessitated travelling, not Second-class, which is only half as dear as First-class, but by Intermediate, which is very awful indeed. There are no cushions in the Intermediate class, and the population are either Intermediate, which is Eurasian, or native, which for a long night journey is nasty, or Loafer, which is amusing though intoxicated. Intermediates do not patronize refreshment-rooms. They carry their food in bundles and pots, and buy sweets from the native sweetmeat sellers, and drink the roadside water. That is why in the hot weather Intermediates are taken out of the carriages dead,

and in all weathers are most properly looked down upon.

My particular Intermediate happened to be empty till I reached Nasirabad, when a huge gentleman in shirt-sleeves entered, and, following the custom of Intermediates, passed the time of day. He was a wanderer and a vagabond like myself, but with an educated taste for whisky. He told tales of things he had seen and done, of out-of-the-way corners of the Empire into which he had penetrated, and of adventures in which he risked his life for a few days' food. "If India was filled with men like you and me, not knowing more than the crows where they'd get their next day's rations, it isn't seventy millions of revenue the land would be paying—it's seven hundred millions," said he; and as I looked at his mouth and chin I was disposed to agree with him. We talked politics—the politics of Loaferdom that sees things from the underside where the lath and plaster is not smoothed off—and we talked postal arrangements because my friend wanted to send a telegram back from the next station to Ajmir, which is the turning-off place from the Bombay to the Mhow line as you travel westward. My friend had no money beyond eight annas which he wanted for dinner, and I had no money at all, owing to the hitch in the Budget before mentioned. Further, I was going into a wilderness where, though I should resume touch with the Treasury, there were no telegraph offices. I was, therefore, unable to help him in any way.

"We might threaten a Station-master, and make him send a wire on tick," said my friend, "but that 'd mean inquiries for you and for me, and I've got my hands full these days. Did you say you were travelling back along this line within any days?"

"Within ten," I said.

"Can't you make it eight?" said he. "Mine is rather urgent business."

"I can send your telegram within ten days if that will serve you," I said.

"I couldn't trust the wire to fetch him now I think of it. It's this way. He leaves Delhi on the 23rd for Bombay. That means he'll be running through Ajmir about the night of the 23rd."

"But I'm going into the Indian Desert," I explained.

"Well *and* good," said he. "You'll be changing at Marwar Junction to get into Jodhpore territory—you must do that—and he'll be coming through Marwar Junction in the early morning of the 24th by the Bombay Mail. Can you be at Marwar Junction on that time? 'Twon't be inconveniencing you, because I know that there's precious few pickings to be got out of those Central India States—even though you pretend to be correspondent of the *Backwoodsman*."

"Have you ever tried that trick?" I asked.

"Again and again, but the Residents find you out, and then you get escorted to the Border before you've time to get your knife into them. But about my friend here. I *must* give him word o' mouth to tell him what's come to me or else he won't know where to go. I would take it more than kind of you if you was to come out of Central India in time to catch him at Marwar Junction, and say to him: 'He has gone South for the week.' He'll know what that means. He's a big man with a red beard, and a great swell he is. You'll find him sleeping like a gentleman with all his luggage round him in a Second-class compartment. But don't you be afraid. Slip down the window and say: 'He has gone South for the week,' and he'll tumble. It's only cutting your time of stay in those parts

by two days. I ask you as a stranger—going to the West," he said with emphasis.

"Where have *you* come from?" said I.

"From the East," said he, "and I am hoping that you will give him the message on the square—for the sake of my Mother as well as your own."

Englishmen are not usually softened by appeals to the memory of their mothers, but for certain reasons, which will be fully apparent, I saw fit to agree.

"It's more than a little matter," said he, "and that's why I ask you to do it—and now I know that I can depend on you doing it. A Second-class carriage at Marwar Junction, and a red-haired man asleep in it. You'll be sure to remember. I get out at the next station, and I must hold on there till he comes or sends me what I want."

"I'll give the message if I catch him," I said, "and for the sake of your Mother as well as mine I'll give you a word of advice. Don't try to run the Central India States just now as the correspondent of the *Backwoodsman*. There's a real one knocking about here, and it might lead to trouble."

"Thank you," said he simply, "and when will the swine be gone? I can't starve because he's ruining my work. I wanted to get hold of the Degumber Rajah down here about his father's widow, and give him a jump."

"What did he do to his father's widow, then?"

"Filled her up with red pepper and slippered her to death as she hung from a beam. I found that out myself and I'm the only man that would dare going into the State to get hush-money for it. They'll try to poison me, same as they did in Chortumna when I went on the loot there. But you'll give the man at Marwar Junction my message?"

He got out at a little roadside station, and I reflected. I had heard, more than once, of men personating corre-

spondents of newspapers and bleeding small Native States with threats of exposure, but I had never met any of the caste before. They lead a hard life, and generally die with great suddenness. The Native States have a wholesome horror of English newspapers, which may throw light on their peculiar methods of government, and do their best to choke correspondents with champagne, or drive them out of their mind with four-in-hand barouches. They do not understand that nobody cares a straw for the internal administration of Native States so long as oppression and crime are kept within decent limits, and the ruler is not drugged, drunk or diseased from one end of the year to the other. Native States were created by Providence in order to supply picturesque scenery, tigers and tall writing. They are the dark places of the earth, full of unimaginable cruelty, touching the Railway and the Telegraph on one side, and on the other the days of Harun-al-Raschid. When I left the train I did business with divers Kings, and in eight days passed through many changes of life. Sometimes I wore dress clothes and consorted with Princes and Politicals, drinking from crystal and eating from silver. Sometimes I lay out upon the ground and devoured what I could get from a plate made of a flapjack, and drank the running water, and slept under the same rug as my servant. It was all in the day's work.

Then I headed for the Great Indian Desert upon the proper date, as I had promised, and the night Mail set me down at Marwar Junction, where a funny little happy-go-lucky, native-managed railway runs to Jodhpore. The Bombay Mail from Delhi makes a short halt at Marwar. She arrived as I got in, and I had just time to hurry to her platform and go down the carriages. There was only one Second-class on the train. I slipped the window and

looked down upon a flaming red beard, half-covered by a railway rug. That was my man, fast asleep, and I dug him gently in the ribs. He woke with a grunt and I saw his face in the light of the lamps. It was a great and shining face.

"Tickets again?" said he.

"No," said I. "I am to tell you that he is gone South for the week. He is gone South for the week!"

The train had begun to move out. The red man rubbed his eyes. "He has gone South for the week," he repeated. "Now that's just like his impidence. Did he say that I was to give you anything? 'Cause I won't."

"He didn't," I said and dropped away, and watched the red lights die out in the dark. It was horribly cold because the wind was blowing off the sands. I climbed into my own train—not an Intermediate Carriage this time—and went to sleep.

If the man with the beard had given me a rupee I should have kept it as a memento of a rather curious affair. But the consciousness of having done my duty was my only reward.

Later on I reflected that two gentlemen like my friends could not do any good if they foregathered and personated correspondents of newspapers, and might, if they "stuck up" one of the little rat-trap States of Central India or Southern Rajputana, get themselves into serious difficulties. I therefore took some trouble to describe them as accurately as I could remember to people who would be interested in deporting them: and succeeded, so I was later informed, in having them headed back from the Degumber borders.

Then I became respectable, and returned to an Office where there were no Kings and no incidents except the daily manufacture of a newspaper. A newspaper office

seems to attract every conceivable sort of person to the prejudice of discipline. Zenana-mission ladies arrive, and beg that the Editor will instantly abandon all his duties to describe a Christian prize-giving in a back slum of a perfectly inaccessible village; Colonels who have been overpassed for commands sit down and sketch the outline of a series of ten, twelve or twenty-four leading articles on Seniority *versus* Selection; missionaries wish to know why they have not been permitted to escape from their regular vehicles of abuse and swear at a brother missionary under special patronage of the editorial We; stranded theatrical companies troop up to explain that they cannot pay for their advertisements, but on their return from New Zealand or Tahiti will do so with interest; inventors of patent punkah-pulling machines, carriage couplings and unbreakable swords and axletrees call with specifications in their pockets and hours at their disposal; tea companies enter and elaborate their prospectuses with the office pens; secretaries of ball committees clamor to have the glories of their last dance more fully expounded; strange ladies rustle in and say: "I want a hundred lady's cards printed *at once,* please," which is manifestly part of an editor's duty; and every dissolute ruffian that ever tramped the Grand Trunk Road makes it his business to ask for employment as a proof-reader. And, all the time, the telephone bell is ringing madly, and Kings are being killed on the Continent, and Empires are saying: "You're another," and Mister Gladstone is calling down brimstone upon the British Dominions, and the little black copy boys are whining "*kaa-pi chay-ha-yeh*" (copy wanted) liked tired bees, and most of the paper is as blank as Modred's shield.

But that is the amusing part of the year. There are other six months wherein none ever come to call, and the thermometer walks inch by inch up to the top of the glass,

and the office is darkened to just above reading light, and the press machines are red-hot of touch, and nobody writes anything but accounts of amusements in the Hill-stations, or obituary notices. Then the telephone becomes a tinkling terror, because it tells you of the sudden deaths of men and women that you knew intimately, and the prickly heat covers you as with a garment, and you sit down and write: "A slight increase of sickness is reported from the Khuda Janta Khan District. The outbreak is purely sporadic in its nature, and thanks to the energetic efforts of the District authorities, is now almost at an end. It is, however, with deep regret we record the death, etc."

Then the sickness really breaks out, and the less recording and reporting the better for the peace of the subscribers. But the Empires and Kings continue to divert themselves as selfishly as before, and the Foreman thinks that a daily paper really ought to come out once in twenty-four hours, and all the people at the Hill-stations in the middle of their amusements say: "Good gracious! Why can't the paper be sparkling? I'm sure there's plenty going on up here."

That is the dark half of the moon, and as the advertisements say, "must be experienced to be appreciated."

It was in that season, and a remarkably evil season, that the paper began running the last issue of the week on Saturday night, which is to say Sunday morning, after the custom of a London paper. This was a great convenience, for immediately after the paper was put to bed the dawn would lower the thermometer from 96° to almost 84° for half an hour, and in that chill—you have no idea how cold is 84° on the grass until you begin to pray for it—a very tired man could set off to sleep ere the heat roused him.

One Saturday night it was my pleasant duty to put the

paper to bed alone. A King or courtier or a courtesan or a community was going to die or get a new constitution, or do something that was important on the other side of the world, and the paper was to be held open till the latest possible minute in order to catch the telegram. It was a pitchy black night, as stifling as a June night can be, and the *loo*, the red-hot wind from the westward, was booming among the tinder-dry trees and pretending that the rain was on its heels. Now and again a spot of almost boiling water would fall on the dust with the flop of a frog, but all our weary world knew that was only pretence. It was a shade cooler in the press-room than the office, so I sat there while the type clicked and clicked, and the night-jars hooted at the windows, and the all but naked compositors wiped the sweat from their foreheads and called for water. The thing that was keeping us back, whatever it was, would not come off, though the *loo* dropped and the last type was set, and the whole round earth stood still in the choking heat, with its finger on its lip, to wait the event. I drowsed, and wondered whether the telegraph was a blessing, and whether this dying man or struggling people was aware of the inconvenience the delay was causing. There was no special reason beyond the heat and worry to make tension, but as the clock hands crept up to three o'clock and the machines spun their flywheels two and three times to see that all was in order, before I said the word that would set them off, I could have shrieked aloud.

Then the roar and rattle of the wheels shivered the quiet into little bits. I rose to go away, but two men in white clothes stood in front of me. The first one said: "It's him!" The second said: "So it is!" And they both laughed almost as loudly as the machinery roared, and mopped their foreheads. "We see there was a light burn-

ing across the road and we were sleeping in that ditch there for coolness, and I said to my friend here: 'The office is open. Let's come along and speak to him as turned us back from the Degumber State,' " said the smaller of the two. He was the man I had met in the Mhow train, and his fellow was the red-bearded man of Marwar Junction. There was no mistaking the eyebrows of the one or the beard of the other.

I was not pleased, because I wished to go to sleep, not to squabble with loafers. "What do you want?" I asked.

"Half an hour's talk with you cool and comfortable, in the office," said the red-bearded man. "We'd *like* some drink—the Contrack doesn't begin yet, Peachey, so you needn't look—but what we really want is advice. We don't want money. We ask you as a favor, because you did us a bad turn about Degumber."

I led from the press-room to the stifling office with the maps on the walls, and the red-haired man rubbed his hands. "That's something like," said he. "This was the proper shop to come to. Now, sir, let me introduce to you Brother Peachey Carnehan, that's him, and Brother Daniel Dravot, that is *me*, and the less said about our professions the better, for we have been most things in our time. Soldier, sailor, compositor, photographer, proof-reader, street preacher, and correspondents of the *Backwoodsman* when we thought the paper wanted one. Carnehan is sober, and so am I. Look at us first and see that's sure. It will save you cutting into my talk. We'll take one of your cigars apiece, and you shall see us light it."

I watched the test. The men were absolutely sober, so I gave them each a tepid peg.

"Well *and* good," said Carnehan of the eyebrows, wiping the froth from his mustache. "Let me talk now, Dan. We have been all over India, mostly on foot. We

have been boiler-fitters, engine-drivers, petty contractors, and all that, and we have decided that India isn't big enough for such as us."

They certainly were too big for the office. Dravot's beard seemed to fill half the room and Carnehan's shoulders the other half, as they sat on the big table. Carnehan continued: "The country isn't half worked out because they that governs it won't let you touch it. They spend all their blessed time in governing it, and you can't lift a spade, nor chip a rock, nor look for oil, nor anything like that without all the Government saying: 'Leave it alone and let us govern.' Therefore, such as it is, we will let it alone, and go away to some other place where a man isn't crowded and can come to his own. We are not little men, and there is nothing that we are afraid of except Drink, and we have signed a Contrack on that. *Therefore* we are going away to be Kings."

"Kings in our own right," muttered Dravot.

"Yes, of course," I said. "You've been tramping in the sun, and it's a very warm night, and hadn't you better sleep over the notion? Come to-morrow."

"Neither drunk nor sunstruck," said Dravot. "We have slept over the notion half a year, and require to see Books and Atlases, and we have decided that there is only one place now in the world that two strong men can Sar-a-*whack*. They call it Kafiristan. By my reckoning it's the top right-hand corner of Afghanistan, not more than three hundred miles from Peshawar. They have two-and-thirty heathen idols there, and we'll be the thirty-third. It's a mountainous country, and the women of those parts are very beautiful."

"But that is provided against in the Contrack," said Carnehan. "Neither Women nor Liquor, Daniel."

"And that's all we know, except that no one has gone

there, and they fight, and in any place where they fight a man who knows how to drill men can always be a King. We shall go to those parts and say to any King we find: 'D'you want to vanquish your foes?' and we will show him how to drill men; for that we know better than anything else. Then we will subvert that King and seize his Throne and establish a Dy-nasty."

"You'll be cut to pieces before you're fifty miles across the Border," I said. "You have to travel through Afghanistan to get to that country. It's one mass of mountains and peaks and glaciers, and no Englishman has been through it. The people are utter brutes, and even if you reached them you couldn't do anything."

"That's more like," said Carnehan. "If you could think us a little more mad we would be more pleased. We have come to you to know about this country, to read a book about it, and to be shown maps. We want you to tell us that we are fools and to show us your books."

He turned to the bookcases.

"Are you at all in earnest?" I said.

"A little," said Dravot sweetly. "As big a map as you have got, even if it's all blank where Kafiristan is, and any books you've got. We can read, though we aren't very educated."

I uncased the big thirty-two-miles-to-the-inch map of India, and two smaller Frontier maps, hauled down volume INF-KAN of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and the men consulted them.

"See here!" said Dravot, his thumb on the map. "Up to Jagdallak, Peachey and me know the road. We was there with Roberts' Army. We'll have to turn off to the right at Jagdallak through Laghmann territory. Then we get among the hills—fourteen thousand feet—fifteen

thousand—it will be cold work there, but it don't look very far on the map."

I handed him Wood on the *Sources of the Oxus.* Carnehan was deep in the *Encyclopædia.*

"They're a mixed lot," said Dravot reflectively; "and it won't help us to know the names of their tribes. The more tribes the more they'll fight, and the better for us. From Jagdallak to Ashang. H'mm!"

"But all the information about the country is as sketchy and inaccurate as can be," I protested. "No one knows anything about it really. Here's the file of the *United Services' Institute.* Read what Bellew says."

"Blow Bellew!" said Carnehan. "Dan, they're an all-fired lot of heathens, but this book here says they think they're related to us English."

I smoked while the men pored over *Raverty, Wood,* the maps and the *Encyclopædia.*

"There is no use your waiting," said Dravot politely. "It's about four o'clock now. We'll go before six o'clock if you want to sleep, and we won't steal any of the papers. Don't you sit up. We're two harmless lunatics, and if you come to-morrow evening down to the Serai we'll say good-by to you."

"You *are* two fools," I answered. "You'll be turned back at the Frontier or cut up the minute you set foot in Afghanistan. Do you want any money or a recommendation down-country? I can help you to the chance of work next week."

"Next week we shall be hard at work ourselves, thank you," said Dravot. "It isn't so easy being a King as it looks. When we've got our Kingdom in going order we'll let you know, and you can come up and help us to govern it."

"Would two lunatics make a Contrack like that?" said

Carnehan, with subdued pride, showing me a greasy half-sheet of note-paper on which was written the following. I copied it, then and there, as a curiosity:

This Contract between me and you persuing witnesseth in the name of God—Amen and so forth.

(One) That me and you will settle this matter together: *i.e.*, to be Kings of Kafiristan.

(Two) That you and me will not, while this matter is being settled, look at any Liquor, nor any Woman black, white or brown, so as to get mixed up with one or the other harmful.

(Three) That we conduct ourselves with dignity and discretion, and if one of us gets into trouble the other will stay by him.

Signed by you and me this day.

Peachey Taliaferro Carnehan.
Daniel Dravot.
Both Gentlemen at Large.

"There was no need for the last article," said Carnehan, blushing modestly; "but it looks regular. Now you know the sort of men that loafers are—we *are* loafers, Dan, until we get out of India—and *do* you think that we would sign a Contrack like that unless we was in earnest? We have kept away from the two things that make life worth having."

"You won't enjoy your lives much longer if you are going to try this idiotic adventure. Don't set the office on fire," I said, "and go away before nine o'clock."

I left them still poring over the maps and making notes on the back of the "Contrack." "Be sure to come down to the Serai to-morrow," were their parting words.

The Kumharsen Serai is the great four-square sink of humanity where the strings of camels and horses from the North load and unload. All the nationalities of Central

Asia may be found there, and most of the folk of India proper. Balkh and Bokhara there meet Bengal and Bombay, and try to draw eye-teeth. You can buy ponies, turquoises, Persian pussy-cats, saddle-bags, fat-tailed sheep and musk in the Kumharsen Serai, and get many strange things for nothing. In the afternoon I went down there to see whether my friends intended to keep their word or were lying about drunk.

A priest attired in fragments of ribbons and rags stalked up to me, gravely twisting a child's paper whirligig. Behind him was his servant bending under the load of a crate of mud toys. The two were loading up two camels, and the inhabitants of the Serai watched them with shrieks of laughter.

"The priest is mad," said a horse-dealer to me. "He is going up to Kabul to sell toys to the Amir. He will either be raised to honor or have his head cut off. He came in here this morning and has been behaving madly ever since."

"The witless are under the protection of God," stammered a flat-cheeked Usbeg in broken Hindi. "They foretell future events."

"Would they could have foretold that my caravan would have been cut up by the Shinwaris almost within shadow of the Pass!" grunted the Eusufzai agent of a Rajputana trading-house whose goods had been feloniously diverted into the hands of other robbers just across the Border, and whose misfortunes were the laughing-stock of the bazar. "Ohé, priest, whence come you and whither do you go?"

"From Roum have I come," shouted the priest, waving his whirligig; "from Roum, blown by the breath of a hundred devils across the sea! O thieves, robbers, liars, the blessing of Pir Khan on pigs, dogs and perjurers! Who

will take the Protected of God to the North to sell charms that are never still to the Amir? The camels shall not gall, the sons shall not fall sick, and the wives shall remain faithful while they are away, of the men who give me place in their caravan. Who will assist me to slipper the King of the Roos with a golden slipper with a silver heel? The protection of Pir Khan be upon his labors!" He spread out the skirts of his gaberdine and pirouetted between the lines of tethered horses.

"There starts a caravan from Peshawar to Kabul in twenty days, *Huzrut*," said the Eusufzai trader. "My camels go therewith. Do thou also go and bring us good-luck."

"I will go even now!" shouted the priest. "I will depart upon my winged camels, and be at Peshawar in a day! Ho! Hazar Mir Khan," he yelled to his servant, "drive out the camels, but let me first mount my own."

He leaped on the back of his beast as it knelt, and, turning round to me, cried: "Come thou also, Sahib, a little along the road, and I will sell thee a charm—an amulet that shall make thee King of Kafiristan."

Then the light broke upon me, and I followed the two camels out of the Serai till we reached open road and the priest halted.

"What d' you think o' that?" said he in English. "Carnehan can't talk their patter, so I've made him my servant. He makes a handsome servant. 'Tisn't for nothing that I've been knocking about the country for fourteen years. Didn't I do that talk neat? We'll hitch on to a caravan at Peshawar till we get to Jagdallak, and then we'll see if we can get donkeys for our camels, and strike into Kafiristan. Whirligigs for the Amir, O Lor! Put your hand under the camel-bags and tell me what you feel."

I felt the butt of a Martini, and another and another.

"Twenty of 'em," said Dravot placidly. "Twenty of 'em, and ammunition to correspond, under the whirligigs and the mud dolls."

"Heaven help you if you are caught with those things!" I said. "A Martini is worth her weight in silver among the Pathans."

"Fifteen hundred rupees of capital—every rupee we could beg, borrow, or steal—are invested on these two camels," said Dravot. "We won't get caught. We're going through the Khaiber with a regular caravan. Who'd touch a poor mad priest?"

"Have you got everything you want?" I asked, overcome with astonishment.

"Not yet, but we shall soon. Give us a memento of your kindness, *Brother*. You did me a service yesterday, and that time in Marwar. Half my Kingdom shall you have, as the saying is." I slipped a small charm compass from my watch-chain and handed it up to the priest.

"Good-by," said Dravot, giving me his hand cautiously. "It's the last time we'll shake hands with an Englishman these many days. Shake hands with him, Carnehan," he cried, as the second camel passed me.

Carnehan leaned down and shook hands. Then the camels passed away along the dusty road, and I was left alone to wonder. My eye could detect no failure in the disguises. The scene in the Serai attested that they were complete to the native mind. There was just the chance, therefore, that Carnehan and Dravot would be able to wander through Afghanistan without detection. But, beyond, they would find death, certain and awful death.

Ten days later a native friend of mine, giving me the news of the day from Peshawar, wound up his letter with: "There has been much laughter here on account of a certain mad priest who is going in his estimation to sell petty

gauds and insignificant trinkets which he ascribes as great charms to H. H. the Amir of Bokhara. He passed through Peshawar and associated himself to the Second Summer caravan that goes to Kabul. The merchants are pleased because through superstition they imagine that such mad fellows bring good fortune."

The two, then, were beyond the Border. I would have prayed for them, but that night a real King died in Europe, and demanded an obituary notice.

. . . . . .

The wheel of the world swings through the same phases again and again. Summer passed and winter thereafter, and came and passed again. The daily paper continued and I with it, and upon the third summer there fell a hot night, a night-issue, and a strained waiting for something to be telegraphed from the other side of the world, exactly as had happened before. A few great men had died in the past two years, the machines worked with more clatter, and some of the trees in the Office garden were a few feet taller. But that was all the difference.

I passed over to the press-room, and went through just such a scene as I have already described. The nervous tension was stronger than it had been two years before, and I felt the heat more acutely. At three o'clock I cried "Print off," and turned to go, when there crept to my chair what was left of a man. He was bent into a circle, his head was sunk between his shoulders, and he moved his feet one over the other like a bear. I could hardly see whether he walked or crawled—this rag-wrapped, whining cripple who addressed me by name, crying that he was come back. "Can you give me a drink?" he whimpered. "For the Lord's sake, give me a drink!"

I went back to the office, the man following with groans of pain, and I turned up the lamp.

"Don't you know me?" he gasped, dropping into a chair, and he turned his drawn face, surmounted by a shock of gray hair, to the light.

I looked at him intently. Once before had I seen eyebrows that met over the nose in an inch-broad black band, but for the life of me I could not tell where.

"I don't know you," I said, handing him the whisky. "What can I do for you?"

He took a gulp of the spirit raw, and shivered in spite of the suffocating heat.

"I've come back," he repeated; "and I was the King of Kafiristan—me and Dravot—crowned Kings we was! In this office we settled it—you setting there and giving us the books. I am Peachey—Peachey Taliaferro Carnehan, and you've been setting here ever since—O Lord!"

I was more than a little astonished and expressed my feelings accordingly.

"It's true," said Carnehan, with a dry cackle, nursing his feet, which were wrapped in rags. "True as gospel. Kings we were, with crowns upon our heads — me and Dravot—poor Dan—oh, poor, poor Dan, that would never take advice, not though I begged of him!"

"Take the whisky," I said, "and take your own time. Tell me all you can recollect of everything from beginning to end. You got across the Border on your camels, Dravot dressed as a mad priest, and you his servant. Do you remember that?"

"I ain't mad—yet, but I shall be that way soon. Of course I remember. Keep looking at me, or maybe my words will go all to pieces. Keep looking at me in my eyes and don't say anything."

I leaned forward and looked into his face as steadily as I could. He dropped one hand upon the table and I grasped it by the wrist. It was twisted like a bird's claw,

and upon the back was a ragged, red, diamond-shaped scar.

"No, don't look there. Look at *me*," said Carnehan. "That comes afterwards, but for the Lord's sake don't distrack me. We left with that caravan, me and Dravot playing all sorts of antics to amuse the people we were with. Dravot used to make us laugh in the evening when all the people was cooking their dinners—cooking their dinners, and . . . . what did they do then? They lit little fires with sparks that went into Dravot's beard, and we all laughed—fit to die. Little red fires they was, going into Dravot's big red beard—so funny." His eyes left mine and he smiled foolishly.

"You went as far as Jagdallak with that caravan," I said at a venture, "after you had lit those fires. To Jagdallak, where you turned off to try to get into Kafiristan."

"No, we didn't neither. What are you talking about? We turned off before Jagdallak, because we heard the roads was good. But they wasn't good enough for our two camels—mine and Dravot's. When we left the caravan Dravot took off all his clothes and mine too, and said we would be heathen, because the Kafirs didn't allow Mohammedans to talk to them. So we dressed betwixt and between, and such a sight as Daniel Dravot I never saw yet nor expect to see again. He burned half his beard, and slung a sheepskin over his shoulder, and shaved his head into patterns. He shaved mine, too, and made me wear outrageous things to look like a heathen. That was in a most mountainous country, and our camels couldn't go along any more because of the mountains. They were tall and black, and coming home I saw them fight like wild goats—there are lots of goats in Kafiristan. And these mountains, they never keep still, no more than the

goats. Always fighting they are, and don't let you sleep at night."

"Take some more whisky," I said very slowly. "What did you and Daniel Dravot do when the camels could go no further because of the rough roads that led into Kafiristan?"

"What did which do? There was a party called Peachey Taliaferro Carnehan that was with Dravot. Shall I tell you about him? He died out there in the cold. Slap from the bridge fell old Peachey, turning and twisting in the air like a penny whirligig that you can sell to the Amir.—No; they was two for three ha'pence, those whirligigs, or I am much mistaken and woful sore. And then these camels were no use, and Peachey said to Dravot: 'For the Lord's sake, let's get out of this before our heads are chopped off,' and with that they killed the camels all among the mountains, not having anything in particular to eat, but first they took off the boxes with the guns and the ammunition, till two men came along driving four mules. Dravot up and dances in front of them, singing: 'Sell me four mules.' Says the first man: 'If you are rich enough to buy you are rich enough to rob'; but before ever he could put his hand to his knife Dravot breaks his neck over his knee, and the other party runs away. So Carnehan loaded the mules with the rifles that was taken off the camels, and together we starts forward into those bitter cold mountainous parts, and never a road broader than the back of your hand."

He paused for a moment, while I asked him if he could remember the nature of the country through which he had journeyed.

"I am telling you as straight as I can, but my head isn't as good as it might be. They drove nails through it to make me hear better how Dravot died. The country

was mountainous and the mules were most contrary, and the inhabitants was dispersed and solitary. They went up and up, and down and down, and that other party, Carnehan, was imploring of Dravot not to sing and whistle so loud, for fear of bringing down the tremenjus avalanches. But Dravot says that if a King couldn't sing it wasn't worth being King, and whacked the mules over the rump, and never took no heed for ten cold days. We came to a big level valley all among the mountains, and the mules were near dead, so we killed them, not having anything in special for them or us to eat. We sat upon the boxes, and played odd and even with the cartridges that was jolted out.

"Then ten men with bows and arrows ran down that valley chasing twenty men with bows and arrows, and the row was tremenjus. They was fair men—fairer than you or me—with yellow hair and remarkable well built. Says Dravot, unpacking the guns: 'This is the beginning of the business. We'll fight for the ten men,' and with that he fires two rifles at the twenty men, and drops one of them at two hundred yards from the rock where we was sitting. The other men began to run, but Carnehan and Dravot sits on the boxes picking them off at all ranges, up and down the valley. Then we goes up to the ten men that had run across the snow, too, and they fires a footy little arrow at us. Dravot he shoots above their heads and they all falls down flat. Then he walks over them and kicks them, and then he lifts them up and shakes hands all round to make them friendly like. He calls them and gives them the boxes to carry, and waves his hand for all the world as though he was King already. They take the boxes and him across the valley and up the hill into a pine wood on the top, where there was half a dozen big stone idols. Dravot he goes to the biggest—a

fellow they call Imbra—and lays a rifle and a cartridge at his feet, rubbing his nose respectful with his own nose, patting him on the head, and saluting in front of it. He turns round to the men and nods his head, and says 'That's all right. I'm in the know, too, and all these old jim-jams are my friends.' Then he opens his mouth and points down it, and when the first man brings him food, he says—'No'; and when the second man brings him food, he says—'No'; but when one of the old priests and the boss of the village brings him food, he says—'Yes,' very haughty, and eats it slow. That was how we came to our first village, without any trouble, just as though we had tumbled from the skies. But we tumbled from one of those damned rope-bridges, you see, and you couldn't expect a man to laugh much after that."

"Take some more whisky and go on," I said. "That was the first village you came into. How did you get to be King?"

"I wasn't King," said Carnehan. "Dravot he was the King, and a handsome man he looked with the gold crown on his head and all. Him and the other party stayed in that village, and every morning Dravot sat by the side of old Imbra, and the people came and worshipped. That was Dravot's order. Then a lot of men came into the valley, and Carnehan and Dravot picks them off with the rifles before they knew where they was, and runs down into the valley and up again the other side, and finds another village, same as the first one, and the people all falls down flat on their faces, and Dravot says, 'Now what is the trouble between you two villages?' and the people points to a woman, as fair as you or me, that was carried off, and Dravot takes her back to the first village and counts up the dead—eight there was. For each dead man Dravot pours a little milk on the ground and waves his arms like

a whirligig and 'That's all right,' says he. Then he and Carnehan takes the big boss of each village by the arm and walks them down into the valley, and shows them how to scratch a line with a spear right down the valley, and gives each a sod of turf from both sides o' the line. Then all the people comes down and shouts like the Devil and all, and Dravot says, 'Go and dig the land, and be fruitful and multiply,' which they did, though they didn't understand. Then we asks the names of things in their lingo—bread and water and fire and idols and such, and Dravot leads the priest of each village up to the idol, and says he must sit there and judge the people, and if anything goes wrong he is to be shot.

"Next week they was all turning up the land in the valley as quiet as bees and much prettier, and the priests heard all the complaints and told Dravot in dumb show what it was about. 'That's just the beginning,' says Dravot. 'They think we're Gods.' He and Carnehan picks out twenty good men and shows them how to click off a rifle and form fours, and advance in line, and they was very pleased to do so, and clever to see the hang of it. Then he takes out his pipe and his baccy-pouch and leaves one at one village and one at the other, and off we two goes to see what was to be done in the next valley. That was all rock, and there was a little village there, and Carnehan says,—'Send 'em to the old valley to plant,' and takes 'em there and gives 'em some land that wasn't took before. They were a poor lot, and we blooded 'em with a kid before letting 'em into the new Kingdom. That was to impress the people, and then they settled down quiet, and Carnehan went back to Dravot, who had got into another valley all snow and ice and most mountainous. There was no people there and the Army got afraid, so Dravot shoots one of them, and goes on till he finds some people in a vil-

lage, and the Army explains that unless the people wants to be killed they had better not shoot their little matchlocks; for they had matchlocks. We makes friends with the priest and I stays there alone with two of the Army, teaching the men how to drill, and a thundering big Chief comes across the snow with kettle-drums and horns twanging, because he heard there was a new God kicking about. Carnehan sights for the brown of the men half a mile across the snow and wings one of them. Then he sends a message to the Chief that, unless he wished to be killed, he must come and shake hands with me and leave his arms behind. The Chief comes alone first, and Carnehan shakes hands with him and whirls his arms about same as Dravot used, and very much surprised that Chief was, and strokes my eyebrows. Then Carnehan goes alone to the Chief and asks him in dumb show if he had an enemy he hated. 'I have,' says the Chief. So Carnehan weeds out the pick of his men, and sets the two of the Army to show them drill and at the end of two weeks the men can manœuver about as well as Volunteers. So he marches with the Chief to a great big plain on the top of a mountain, and the Chief's men rushes into a village and takes it; we three Martinis firing into the brown of the enemy. So we took that village too, and I gives the Chief a rag from my coat, and says, 'Occupy till I come,' which was scriptural. By way of a reminder, when me and the Army was eighteen hundred yards away, I drops a bullet near him standing on the snow, and all the people falls flat on their faces. Then I sends a letter to Dravot, wherever he be by land or by sea."

At the risk of throwing the creature out of train I interrupted, "How could you write a letter up yonder?"

"The letter? Oh! The letter! Keep looking at me between the eyes, please. It was a string-talk letter, that

we'd learned the way of it from a blind beggar in the Punjab."

I remembered that there had once come to the office a blind man with a knotted twig and a piece of string which he wound round the twig according to some cipher of his own. He could, after the lapse of days or hours, repeat the sentence which he had reeled up. He had reduced the alphabet to eleven primitive sounds; and tried to teach me his method, but failed.

"I sent that letter to Dravot," said Carnehan; "and told him to come back because this Kingdom was growing too big for me to handle, and then I struck for the first valley, to see how the priests were working. They called the village we took along with the Chief, Bashkai, and the first village we took Er-Heb. The priests at Er-Heb was doing all right, but they had a lot of pending cases about land to show me, and some men from another village had been firing arrows at night. I went out and looked for that village and fired four rounds at it from a thousand yards. That used all the cartridges I cared to spend, and I waited for Dravot, who had been away two or three months, and I kept my people quiet.

"One morning I heard the devil's own noise of drums and horns, and Dan Dravot marches down the hill with his Army and a tail of hundreds of men, and, which was the most amazing—a great gold crown on his head. 'My Gord, Carnehan,' says Daniel, 'this is a tremenjus business, and we've got the whole country as far as it's worth having. I am the son of Alexander by Queen Semiramis, and you're my younger brother and a God too! It's the biggest thing we've ever seen. I've been marching and fighting for six weeks with the Army, and every footy little village for fifty miles has come in rejoiceful; and more than that, I've got the key of the whole show, as you'll see, and I've got

a crown for you! I told 'em to make two of 'em at a place called Shu, where the gold lies in the rock like suet in mutton. Gold I've seen, and turquoise I've kicked out of the cliffs, and there's garnets in the sands of the river, and here's a chunk of amber that a man brought me. Call up all the priests and, here, take your crown.'

"One of the men opens a black hair bag and I slips the crown on. It was too small and too heavy, but I wore it for the glory. Hammered gold it was—five-pound weight, like a hoop of a barrel.

"'Peachey,' says Dravot, 'we don't want to fight no more. The Craft's the trick, so help me!' and he brings forward that same Chief that I left at Bashkai—Billy Fish we called him afterwards, because he was so like Billy Fish that drove the big tank-engine at Mach on the Bolan in the old days. 'Shake hands with him,' says Dravot, and I shook hands and nearly dropped, for Billy Fish gave me the Grip. I said nothing, but tried him with the Fellow Craft Grip. He answers all right, and I tried the Master's Grip, but that was a slip. 'A Fellow Craft he is!' I says to Dan. 'Does he know the word?' 'He does,' says Dan, 'and all the priests know. It's a miracle! The Chiefs and the priests can work a Fellow Craft Lodge in a way that's very like ours, and they've cut the marks on the rocks, but they don't know the Third Degree, and they've come to find out. It's Gord's Truth. I've known these long years that the Afghans knew up to the Fellow Craft Degree, but this is a miracle. A God and a Grand-Master of the Craft am I, and a Lodge in the Third Degree I will open, and we'll raise the head priests and the Chiefs of the villages.'

"'It's against all the law,' I says, 'holding a Lodge without warrant from any one; and we never held office in any Lodge.'

"'It's a master-stroke of policy,' says Dravot. 'It

means running the country as easy as a four-wheeled bogy on a down grade. We can't stop to inquire now, or they'll turn against us. I've forty Chiefs at my heel, and passed and raised according to their merit they shall be. Billet these men on the villages, and see that we run up a Lodge of some kind. The temple of Imbra will do for the Lodge room. The women must make aprons as you show them. I'll hold a levee of Chiefs to-night and Lodge to-morrow.'

"I was fair run off my legs, but I wasn't such a fool as not to see what a pull this Craft business gave us. I showed the priests' families how to make aprons of the degrees, but for Dravot's apron the blue border and marks was made of turquoise lumps on white hide, not cloth. We took a great square stone in the temple for the Master's chair, and little stones for the officers' chairs, and painted the black pavement with white squares, and did what we could to make things regular.

"At the levee which was held that night on the hillside with big bonfires, Dravot gives out that him and me were Gods and sons of Alexander, and Past Grand-Masters in the Craft, and was come to make Kafiristan a country where every man should eat in peace and drink in quiet, and specially obey us. Then the Chiefs come round to shake hands, and they was so hairy and white and fair it was just shaking hands with old friends. We gave them names according as they were like men we had known in India—Billy Fish, Holly Dilworth, Pikky Kergan that was Bazar-master when I was at Mhow, and so on and so on.

"*The* most amazing miracle was at Lodge next night. One of the old priests was watching us continuous, and I felt uneasy, for I knew we'd have to fudge the Ritual, and I didn't know what the men knew. The old priest was a stranger come in from beyond the village of Bashkai. The minute Dravot puts on the Master's apron that the girls

had made for him, the priest fetches a whoop and a howl, and tries to overturn the stone that Dravot was sitting on. 'It's all up now,' I says. 'That comes of meddling with the Craft without warrant!' Dravot never winked an eye, not when ten priests took and tilted over the Grand-Master's chair—which was to say the stone of Imbra. The priest begins rubbing the bottom of it to clear away the black dirt, and presently he shows all the other priests the Master's Mark, same as was on Dravot's apron, cut into the stone. Not even the priests of the temple of Imbra knew it was there. The old chap falls flat on his face at Dravot's feet and kisses 'em. 'Luck again,' says Dravot, across the Lodge to me, 'they say it's the missing Mark that no one could understand the why of. We're more than safe now.' Then he bangs the butt of his gun for a gavel and says: 'By virtue of the authority vested in me by my own right hand and the help of Peachey, I declare myself Grand-Master of all Freemasonry in Kafiristan in this the Mother Lodge o' the country, and King of Kafiristan equally with Peachey!' At that he puts on his crown and I puts on mine—I was doing Senior Warden—and we opens the Lodge in most ample form. It was an amazing miracle! The priests moved in Lodge through the first two degrees almost without telling, as if the memory was coming back to them. After that Peachey and Dravot raised such as was worthy—high priests and Chiefs of far-off villages. Billy Fish was the first, and I can tell you we scared the soul out of him. It was not in any way according to Ritual, but it served our turn. We didn't raise more than ten of the biggest men because we didn't want to make the Degree common. And they was clamoring to be raised.

"'In another six months,' says Dravot, 'we'll hold another Communication and see how you are working.' Then

he asks them about their villages, and learns that they was fighting one against the other and were fair sick and tired of it. And when they wasn't doing that they was fighting with the Mohammedans. 'You can fight those when they come into our country,' says Dravot. 'Tell off every tenth man of your tribes for a Frontier guard, and send two hundred at a time to this valley to be drilled. Nobody is going to be shot or speared any more so long as he does well, and I know that you won't cheat me because you're white people—sons of Alexander—and not like common, black Mohammedans. You are *my* people, and by God,' says he, running off into English at the end—'I'll make a damned fine Nation of you, or I'll die in the making!'

"I can't tell all we did for the next six months, because Dravot did a lot I couldn't see the hang of, and he learned their lingo in a way I never could. My work was to help the people plough, and now and again go out with some of the Army and see what the other villages were doing, and make 'em throw rope bridges across the ravines which cut up the country horrid. Dravot was very kind to me, but when he walked up and down in the pine wood pulling that bloody red beard of his with both fists I knew he was thinking plans I could not advise him about and I just waited for orders.

"But Dravot never showed me disrespect before the people. They were afraid of me and the Army, but they loved Dan. He was the best of friends with the priests and the Chiefs; but any one could come across the hills with a complaint and Dravot would hear him out fair, and call four priests together and say what was to be done. He used to call in Billy Fish from Bashkai and Pikky Kargan from Shu, and an old Chief we called Kefuzelum—it was like enough to his real name—and held councils with 'em when there was any fighting to be done in small

villages. That was his Council of War, and the four priests of Bashkai, Shu, Khawak and Madora was his Privy Council. Between the lot of 'em they sent me, with forty men and twenty rifles, and sixty men carrying turquoises, into the Ghorband country to buy those hand-made Martini rifles that come out of the Amir's workshops at Kabul, from one of the Amir's Herati regiments that would have sold the very teeth out of their mouths for turquoises.

"I stayed in Ghorband a month, and gave the Governor there the pick of my baskets for hush-money, and bribed the Colonel of the regiment some more, and between the two and the tribes people, we got more than a hundred hand-made Martinis, a hundred good Kohat Jezails that 'll throw to six hundred yards, and forty man-loads of very bad ammunition for the rifles. I came back with what I had, and distributed 'em among the men that the Chiefs sent in to me to drill. Dravot was too busy to attend to those things, but the old Army that we first made helped me, and we turned out five hundred men that could drill, and two hundred that knew how to hold arms pretty straight. Even those cork-screwed, hand-made guns was a miracle to them. Dravot talked big about powder-shops and factories, walking up and down in the pine wood when the winter was coming on.

"'I won't make a Nation,' says he. 'I'll make an Empire! These men aren't niggers; they're English! Look at their eyes—look at their mouths. Look at the way they stand up. They sit on chairs in their own houses. They're the Lost Tribes, or something like it, and they've grown to be English. I'll take a census in the spring if the priests don't get frightened. There must be fair two million of 'em in these hills. The villages are full o' little children. The million people—two hundred and fifty thousand fighting men—and all English! They only want

the rifles and a little drilling. Two hundred and fifty thousand men, ready to cut in on Russia's right flank when she tries for India! Peachey, man,' he says, chewing his beard in great hunks, 'we shall be Emperors—Emperors of the Earth! Rajah Brooke will be a suckling to us. I'll treat with the Viceroy on equal terms. I'll ask him to send me twelve picked English—twelve that I know of—to help us govern a bit. There's Mackray, Sergeant-pensioner at Segowli—many's the good dinner he's given me, and his wife a pair of trousers. There's Donkin, the Warder of Tounghoo Jail; there's hundreds that I could lay my hands on if I was in India. The Viceroy shall do it for me. I'll send a man through in the spring for those men, and I'll write for a dispensation from the Grand Lodge for what I've done as Grand-Master. That—and all the Sniders that 'll be thrown out when the native troops in India take up the Martini. They'll be worn smooth, but they'll do for fighting in these hills. Twelve English, a hundred thousand Sniders run through the Amir's country in driblets — I'd be content with twenty thousand in one year—and we'd be an Empire. When everything was shipshape, I'd hand over the crown—this crown I'm wearing now—to Queen Victoria on my knees, and she'd say: "Rise up, Sir Daniel Dravot." Oh, it's big! It's big, I tell you! But there's so much to be done in every place—Bashkai, Khawak, Shu, and everywhere else.'

"'What is it?' I says. 'There are no more men coming in to be drilled this autumn. Look at those fat, black clouds. They're bringing the snow.'

"'It isn't that,' says Daniel, putting his hand very hard on my shoulder; 'and I don't wish to say anything that's against you, for no other living man would have followed me and made me what I am as you have done. You're a

first-class Commander-in-Chief, and the people know you; but—it's a big country, and somehow you can't help me, Peachey, in the way I want to be helped.'

"'Go to your blasted priests, then!' I said, and I was sorry when I made that remark, but it did hurt me sore to find Daniel talking so superior when I'd drilled all the men, and done all he told me.

"'Don't let's quarrel, Peachey,' says Daniel without cursing. 'You're a King too, and the half of this Kingdom is yours; but can't you see, Peachey, we want cleverer men than us now—three or four of 'em, that we can scatter about for our Deputies. It's a huge great State, and I can't always tell the right thing to do, and I haven't time for all I want to do, and here's the winter coming on and all.' He put half his beard into his mouth, and it was as red as the gold of his crown.

"'I'm sorry, Daniel,' says I. 'I've done all I could. I've drilled the men and shown the people how to stack their oats better; and I've brought in those tinware rifles from Ghorband—but I know what you're driving at. I take it Kings always feel oppressed that way.'

"'There's another thing, too,' says Dravot, walking up and down. 'The winter's coming and these people won't be giving much trouble, and if they do we can't move about. I want a wife.'

"'For Gord's sake leave the women alone!' I says. 'We've both got all the work we can, though I *am* a fool. Remember the Contrack and keep clear o' women.'

"'The Contrack only lasted till such time as we was Kings; and Kings we have been these months past,' says Dravot, weighing his crown in his hand. 'You go get a wife too, Peachey, a nice, strappin', plump girl that 'll keep you warm in the winter. They're prettier than English girls, and we can take the pick of 'em. Boil 'em once or

twice in hot water, and they'll come as fair as chicken and ham.'

"'Don't tempt me!' I says. 'I will not have any dealings with a woman, not till we are a dam' side more settled than we are now. I've been doing the work o' two men, and you've been doing the work o' three. Let's lie off a bit, and see if we can get some better tobacco from Afghan country and run in some good liquor; but no women.'

"'Who's talking o' *women?*' says Dravot. 'I said *wife*—a Queen to breed a King's son for the King. A Queen out of the strongest tribe, that 'll make them your blood-brothers, and that 'll lie by your side and tell you all the people thinks about you and their own affairs. That's what I want.'

"'Do you remember that Bengali woman I kept at Mogul Serai when I was a plate layer?' says I. 'A fat lot o' good she was to me. She taught me the lingo and one or two other things; but what happened? She ran away with the Station Master's servant and half my month's pay. Then she turned up at Dadur Junction in tow of a half-caste, and had the impidence to say I was her husband—all among the drivers in the running-shed!'

"'We've done with that,' says Dravot. 'These women are whiter than you or me, and a Queen I will have for the winter months.'

"'For the last time o' asking, Dan, do *not*,' I says. 'It 'll only bring us harm. The Bible says that Kings ain't to waste their strength on women, 'specially when they've got a new raw Kingdom to work over.'

"'For the last time of answering I will,' says Dravot, and he went away through the pine-trees looking like a big red devil. The low sun hit his crown and beard on one side, and the two blazed like hot coals.

"But getting a wife was not as easy as Dan thought.

He put it before the Council, and there was no answer till Billy Fish said that he'd better ask the girls. Dravot damned them all round. 'What's wrong with me?' he shouts, standing by the idol Imbra. 'Am I a dog or am I not enough of a man for your wenches? Haven't I put the shadow of my hand over this country? Who stopped the last Afghan raid?' It was me really, but Dravot was too angry to remember. 'Who bought your guns? Who repaired the bridges? Who's the Grand-Master of the sign cut in the stone?' and he thumped his hand on the block that he used to sit on in Lodge, and at Council, which opened like Lodge always. Billy Fish said nothing and no more did the others. 'Keep your hair on, Dan,' said I, 'and ask the girls. That's how it's done at Home, and these people are quite English.'

"'The marriage of the King is a matter of State,' says Dan, in a white-hot rage, for he could feel, I hope, that he was going against his better mind. He walked out of the Council room, and the others sat still, looking at the ground.

"'Billy Fish,' says I to the Chief of the Bashkai, 'what's the difficulty here? A straight answer to a true friend.' 'You know,' says Billy Fish. 'How should a man tell you, who knows everything? How can daughters of men marry Gods or Devils? It's not proper.'

"I remembered something like that in the Bible; but if, after seeing us as long as they had, they still believed we were Gods, it wasn't for me to undeceive them.

"'A God can do anything,' says I. 'If the King is fond of a girl he'll not let her die.' 'She'll have to,' said Billy Fish. 'There are all sorts of Gods and Devils in these mountains, and now and again a girl marries one of them and isn't seen any more. Besides, you two know the Mark cut in the stone. Only the Gods know that. We

thought you were men till you showed the sign of the Master.'

"I wished then that we had explained about the loss of the genuine secrets of a Master-Mason at the first go-off; but I said nothing. All that night there was a blowing of horns in a little dark temple half-way down the hill, and I heard a girl crying fit to die. One of the priests told us that she was being prepared to marry the King.

"'I'll have no nonsense of that kind,' says Dan. 'I don't want to interfere with your customs, but I'll take my own wife.' 'The girl's a little bit afraid,' says the priest. 'She thinks she's going to die, and they are a-heartening her up down in the temple.'

"'Hearten her very tender, then,' says Dravot, 'or I'll hearten you with the butt of a gun so that you'll never want to be heartened again.' He licked his lips, did Dan, and stayed up walking about more than half the night, thinking of the wife that he was going to get in the morning. I wasn't any means comfortable, for I knew that dealings with a woman in foreign parts, though you was a crowned King twenty times over, could not but be risky. I got up very early in the morning while Dravot was asleep, and I saw the priests talking together in whispers, and the Chiefs talking together, too, and they looked at me out of the corners of their eyes.

"'What is up, Fish?' I says to the Bashkai man, who was wrapped up in his furs and looking splendid to behold.

"'I can't rightly say,' says he; 'but if you can induce the King to drop all this nonsense about marriage you'll be doing him and me and yourself a great service.'

"'That I do believe,' says I. 'But sure, you know, Billy, as well as me, having fought against and for us, that the King and me are nothing more than two of the finest

men that God Almighty ever made. Nothing more, I do assure you.'

"'That may be,' says Billy Fish, 'and yet I should be sorry if it was.' He sinks his head upon his great fur coat for a minute and thinks. 'King,' says he, 'be you man or God or Devil, I'll stick by you to-day. I have twenty of my men with me, and they will follow me. We'll go to Bashkai until the storm blows over.'

"A little snow had fallen in the night, and everything was white except the greasy fat clouds that blew down and down from the north. Dravot came out with his crown on his head, swinging his arms and stamping his feet, and looking more pleased than Punch.

"'For the last time drop it, Dan,' says I in a whisper. 'Billy Fish here says that there will be a row.'

"'A row among my people!' says Dravot. 'Not much. Peachey, you're a fool not to get a wife too. Where's the girl?' says he with a voice as loud as the braying of a jackass. 'Call up all the Chiefs and priests, and let the Emperor see if his wife suits him.'

"There was no need to call any one. They were all there leaning on their guns and spears round the clearing in the centre of the pine wood. A deputation of priests went down to the little temple to bring up the girl, and the horns blew fit to wake the dead. Billy Fish saunters round and gets as close to Daniel as he could, and behind him stood his twenty men with matchlocks. Not a man of them under six feet. I was next to Dravot, and behind me was twenty men of the regular Army. Up comes the girl, and a strapping wench she was, covered with silver and turquoises, but white as death, and looking back every minute at the priests.

"'She'll do,' said Dan, looking her over. 'What's to be afraid of, lass? Come and kiss me.' He puts his arm

round her. She shuts her eyes, gives a bit of a squeak, and down goes her face in the side of Dan's flaming red beard.

"'The slut's bitten me!' says he, clapping his hand to his neck; and sure enough his hand was red with blood. Billy Fish and two of his matchlock-men catches hold of Dan by the shoulders and drags him into the Bashkai lot, while the priests howls in their lingo, 'Neither God nor Devil but a man!' I was all taken aback, for a priest cut at me in front, and the Army began firing into the Bashkai men.

"'God A-mighty!' says Dan. 'What is the meaning o' this?'

"'Come back! Come away!' says Billy Fish. 'Ruin and Mutiny is the matter. We'll break for Bashkai if we can.'

"I tried to give some sort of orders to my men—the men o' the regular Army—but it was no use, so I fired into the brown of 'em with an English Martini and drilled three beggars in a line. The valley was full of shouting, howling creatures, and every soul was shrieking, 'Not a God nor a Devil but only a man!' The Bashkai troops stuck to Billy Fish all they were worth, but their matchlocks wasn't half as good as the Kabul breech-loaders, and four of them dropped. Dan was bellowing like a bull, for he was very wrathy; and Billy Fish had a hard job to prevent him running out at the crowd.

"'We can't stand,' says Billy Fish. 'Make a run for it down the valley! The whole place is against us.' The matchlock-men ran, and we went down the valley in spite of Dravot's protestations. He was swearing horribly and crying out that he was a King. The priests rolled great stones on us, and the regular Army fired hard, and there wasn't more than six men, not counting Dan, Billy Fish

and Me, that came down to the bottom of the valley alive.

"Then they stopped firing and the horns in the temple blew again. 'Come away—for Gord's sake come away!' says Billy Fish. 'They'll send runners out to all the villages before ever we get to Bashkai. I can protect you there, but I can't do anything now.'

"My own notion is that Dan began to go mad in his head from that hour. He stared up and down like a stuck pig. Then he was all for walking back alone and killing the priests with his bare hands, which he could have done. 'An Emperor am I,' says Daniel, 'and next year I shall be a Knight of the Queen.'

"'All right, Dan,' says I; 'but come along now while there's time.'

"'It's your fault,' says he, 'for not looking after your Army better. There was mutiny in the midst, and you didn't know—you damned engine-driving, plate-laying, missionaries'-pass hunting hound!' He sat upon a rock and called me every foul name he could lay tongue to. I was too heartsick to care, though it was all his foolishness that brought the smash.

"'I'm sorry, Dan,' says I, 'but there's no accounting for natives. This business is our Fifty-Seven. Maybe we'll make something out of it yet, when we've got back to Bashkai.'

"'Let's get to Bashkai, then,' says Dan, 'and by God, when I come back here again I'll sweep the valley so there isn't a bug in a blanket left!'

"We walked all that day, and all that night Dan was stumping up and down on the snow, chewing his beard and muttering to himself.

"'There's no hope o' getting clear,' says Billy Fish. 'The priests will have sent runners to the villages to say that you are only men. Why didn't you stick on as Gods

till things was more settled? I'm a dead man,' says Billy Fish, and he throws himself down on the snow and begins to pray to his Gods.

"Next morning we was in a cruel bad country—all up and down, no level ground at all, and no food either. The six Bashkai men looked at Billy Fish hungry-wise as if they wanted to ask something, but they said never a word. At noon we came to the top of a flat mountain all covered with snow, and when we climbed up into it, behold, there was an Army in position waiting in the middle!

"'The runners have been very quick,' says Billy Fish, with a little bit of a laugh. 'They are waiting for us.'

"Three or four men began to fire from the enemy's side, and a chance shot took Daniel in the calf of the leg. That brought him to his senses. He looks across the snow at the Army, and sees the rifles that we had brought into the country.

"'We're done for,' says he. 'They are Englishmen, these people—and it's my blasted nonsense that has brought you to this. Get back, Billy Fish, and take your men away; you've done what you could, and now cut for it. Carnehan,' says he, 'shake hands with me and go along with Billy. Maybe they won't kill you. I'll go and meet 'em alone. It's me that did it. Me, the King!'

"'Go!' says I. 'Go to Hell, Dan. I'm with you here. Billy Fish, you clear out and we two will meet those folk.'

"'I'm a Chief,' says Billy Fish quite quiet. 'I stay with you. My men can go.'

"The Bashkai fellows didn't wait for a second word but ran off, and Dan and Me and Billy Fish walked across to where the drums were drumming and the horns were horning. It was cold—awful cold. I've got that cold in the back of my head now. There's a lump of it there."

The punkah-coolies had gone to sleep. Two kerosene

lamps were blazing in the office, and the perspiration poured down my face and splashed on the blotter as I leaned forward. Carnehan was shivering, and I feared that his mind might go. I wiped my face, took a fresh grip of the piteously mangled hands and said:—"What happened after that?"

The momentary shift of my eyes had broken the clear current.

"What was you pleased to say?" whined Carnehan. "They took them without any sound. Not a little whisper all along the snow, not though the King knocked down the first man that set hand on him—not though old Peachey fired his last cartridge into the brown of 'em. Not a single solitary sound did those swines make. They just closed up tight, and I tell you their furs stunk. There was a man called Billy Fish, a good friend of us all, and they cut his throat, Sir, then and there, like a pig; and the King kicks up the bloody snow and says:—'We've had a dashed fine run for our money. What's coming next?' But Peachey, Peachey Taliaferro, I tell you, Sir, in confidence as betwixt two friends, he lost his head, Sir. No, he didn't either. The King lost his head, so he did, all along o' one of those cunning rope-bridges. Kindly let me have the paper-cutter, Sir. It tilted this way. They marched him a mile across that snow to a rope-bridge over a ravine with a river at the bottom. You may have seen such. They prodded him behind like an ox. 'Damn your eyes!' says the King. 'D' you suppose I can't die like a gentleman?' He turns to Peachey—Peachey that was crying like a child. 'I've brought you to this, Peachey,' says he. 'Brought you out of your happy life to be killed in Kafiristan, where you was late Commander-in-Chief of the Emperor's forces. Say you forgive me, Peachey.' 'I do,' says Peachey. 'Fully and freely do I forgive you, Dan.' 'Shake hands, Peachey,' says he. 'I'm going now.' Out

he goes, looking neither right nor left, and when he was plumb in the middle of those dizzy dancing ropes, 'Cut, you beggars,' he shouts; and they cut, and old Dan fell, turning round and round and round, twenty thousand miles, for he took half an hour to fall till he struck the water, and I could see his body caught on a rock with the gold crown close beside.

"But do you know what they did to Peachey between two pine-trees? They crucified him, Sir, as Peachey's hands will show. They used wooden pegs for his hands and his feet; and he didn't die. He hung there and screamed; and they took him down next day and said it was a miracle that he wasn't dead. They took him down —poor old Peachey that hadn't done them any harm— that hadn't done them any . . ."

He rocked to and fro and wept bitterly, wiping his eyes with the back of his scarred hands and moaning like a child for some ten minutes.

"They was cruel enough to feed him up in the temple, because they said he was more of a God than old Daniel that was a man. Then they turned him out on the snow, and told him to go home; and Peachey came home in about a year, begging along the roads quite safe; for Daniel Dravot he walked before and said: 'Come along, Peachey. It's a big thing we're doing.' The mountains they danced at night, and the mountains they tried to fall on Peachey's head, but Dan he held up his hand and Peachey came along bent double. He never let go of Dan's hand, and he never let go of Dan's head. They gave it to him as a present in the temple, to remind him not to come again, and though the crown was pure gold, and Peachey was starving, never would Peachey sell the same. You knew Dravot, Sir! You knew Right Worshipful Brother Dravot! Look at him now!"

He fumbled in the mass of rags round his bent waist; brought out a black horsehair bag embroidered with silver thread; and shook therefrom onto my table—the dried, withered head of Daniel Dravot! The morning sun that had long been paling the lamps struck the red beard and blind, sunken eyes; struck, too, a heavy circlet of gold studded with raw turquoises, that Carnehan placed tenderly on the battered temples.

"You behold now," said Carnehan, "the Emperor in his habit as he lived—the King of Kafiristan with his crown upon his head. Poor old Daniel that was a monarch once!"

I shuddered, for, in spite of defacements manifold, I recognized the head of the man of Marwar Junction. Carnehan rose to go. I attempted to stop him. He was not fit to walk abroad. "Let me take away the whisky and give me a little money," he gasped. "I was a King once. I'll go to the Deputy Commissioner and ask to set in the Poorhouse till I get my health. No, thank you, I can't wait till you get a carriage for me. I've urgent private affairs —in the south—at Marwar."

He shambled out of the office and departed in the direction of the Deputy Commissioner's house. That day at noon I had occasion to go down the blinding hot Mall, and I saw a crooked man crawling along the white dust of the roadside, his hat in his hand, quavering dolorously after the fashion of street-singers at Home. There was not a soul in sight, and he was out of all possible earshot of the houses. And he sang through his nose, turning his head from right to left:

"The Son of Man goes forth to war,
A golden crown to gain:
His blood-red banner streams afar—
Who follows in his train?"

I waited to hear no more, but put the poor wretch into my carriage and drove him off to the nearest missionary for eventual transfer to the Asylum. He repeated the hymn twice while he was with me, whom he did not in the least recognize, and I left him singing it to the missionary.

Two days later I inquired after his welfare of the Superintendent of the Asylum.

"He was admitted suffering from sunstroke. He died early yesterday morning," said the Superintendent. "Is it true that he was half an hour bareheaded in the sun at midday?"

"Yes," said I; "but do you happen to know if he had anything upon him by any chance when he died?"

"Not to my knowledge," said the Superintendent.

And there the matter rests.

XII

THE HAPPIEST DAY OF HIS LIFE

BY

Lloyd Osbourne

The Happiest Day of His Life[1]

Lloyd Osbourne

HIS thirtieth birthday! His first youth was behind him, with all its heartburnings, its failures, its manifold humiliations. What had he done these years past but drift, forlorn, penniless, and unattached, over those shallows where others had stuck and prospered —a gentle decline all the way from college in hope and fulfilment? The army and civil service had alike refused him. In the colonies he had toiled unremittingly in half a hundred characters,—groom, cook, boundary rider, steamer roustabout,—always sinking, always failing. Then those last four years in the Islands, and his tumble-down store in Vaiala! Had life nothing more for him than an endless succession of hot, empty days on the farthest beach of Upolu, with scarcely more to eat than the commonest Kanaka, and no other outlet for his energies than the bartering of salt beef for coprah and an occasional night's fishing on the reef? On the other hand, he was well in body, and had times of even thinking himself happy in this fag-end of the world. The old store, rotten and leaky though it was, gave him a dryer bed than he had often found in his wandering life, and the food, if monotonous and poor, was better than the empty belly with which he had often begun an arduous day in Australia. And the

[1] From *The Queen versus Billy*. Copyright, 1900, by Charles Scribner's Sons. By permission of the publishers.

place was extraordinarily beautiful. Yes, he had always admitted that, even in his blackest days of depression, though the beauty of it seemed almost to oppress him at times. But beautiful or not, this was a strange place for his father's son, a strange thirtieth birthday for one who had begun the world with every prospect of faring well and rising high in its esteem, and the sense of his failure again seized him by the throat.

The noise of an incoming boat drew him to the door, and he looked out to see the pastor's old whaler heading through the reef. They had made a night trip to avoid the heat, and all looked tired and weary with their long pull from Apia, and the song with which they timed their paddles sounded mournfully across the lagoon. A half-grown girl leaped into the water and hastened up to the store with something fastened in a banana-leaf.

It was a letter, which she shyly handed the trader. Walter Kinross looked at it with surprise, for it was the first he had received in four years, and the sight of its English stamp and familiar handwriting filled him with something like awe.

"The white man said you would give us a tin of salmon and six *masi*," said the little girl, in native.

Kinross unlocked the dingy trade-room, still in a maze of wonder and impatience, and gave the little girl a box of matches in excess of postage. Then he opened the letter.

My Dear Nephew [it ran]: Your letter asking me to send you a book or two or any old papers I might happen to have about me has just come to hand, and finds me at Long's Hotel, pretty miserable and ill. Yours was a strange note, after a silence of eight years, telling me nothing on earth about yourself save that you are trading in some islands, and seldom see a white face from one year's end to another. When a man is

seventy years of age and is ill, and his nigh-spent life unrolls before him like the pages of a musty old book, and when he wonders a little how it will feel to be dead and done with altogether, I tell you, my boy, he begins to see the spectres of all sorts of old misdeeds rising before him. Past unkindnesses, past neglects, a cold word here, a ten-pound note saved there and an old friend turned empty away—well, well! Without actually going the length of saying that I was either unkind or negligent in your case, I feel sometimes I was rather hard on you as to that mess of yours in London, and that affair at Lowestoft the same year. I was disappointed, and I showed it.

I know you're pretty old to come back and start life afresh here, but if you have not had the unmitigated folly to get married out there and tied by the leg forever, I'll help you to make a new start. You sha'n't starve if three hundred pounds a year will keep you, and if you will try and turn over a new leaf and make a man of yourself in good earnest, I am prepared to mark you down substantially in my will. But mind—no promises—payment strictly by results. You're no longer a boy, and this is probably the last chance you'll ever get of entering civilized life again and meeting respectable folk. I inclose you a draft at sight on Sydney, New South Wales, for two hundred and fifty pounds, for you will doubtless need clothes, etc., as well as your passage money, and if you decide not to return you can accept it as a present from your old uncle. I have told Jones (you would scarcely know the old fellow, Walter, he's so changed) to send you a bundle of books and illustrated papers, which I hope will amuse you more than they seem to do me.

Affectionately yours,

ALFRED BANNOCK.

The trader read the letter with extraordinary attention, though the drift of it was at first almost beyond him—read it and re-read it, dazed and overcome, scarcely realizing his good fortune. He spread out the bill on his knee and smoothed it as he might have patted the head of a dog. It spelled freedom, friends, the life he had been trained and fitted to lead, a future worth having and worth dividing. The elation of it all tingled in his veins, and he

felt like singing. London, the far distant, the inaccessible, now hummed in his ears. He saw the eddying, crowded streets, the emptying play-houses, the gray river sparkling with lights. The smoke of a native oven thrilled him with memories of the underground, and he had but to close his eyes and the surf thundered with the noise of arriving trains.

The house could not contain him and his eager thoughts; he must needs feel the sky overhead and the trades against his cheek, and take all nature into his puny confidence. Besides, Vaiala had now a new charm for him, one he had never counted on to find. Soon, now, it would begin to melt into the irrevocable past; its mist-swept mountains, its forests and roaring waterfalls would fade into nothingness and become no more than an impalpable phantom of his mind, the stuff that dreams are made of. He wandered along the path from one settlement to another, round the great half-moon of the bay, absorbing every impression with a new and tender interest.

There were a dozen little villages to be passed before he could attain the rocky promontory that barred the western shore, pretty hamlets in groves of cocoanuts and bread-fruit, in each perhaps a dozen beehive houses and as many sheds and boat-shelters. Between village and village the path led him under rustling palms and beside the shallow waters of the lagoon and across a river where he surprised some laughing girls at their bath. In the deep shade old men were mending nets, and children were playing tag and cricket with boisterous shouts, or marbles in sandy places. From one house he heard the clapping hands that announced the *'ava;* in another the song and stamp of practising dancers. Hard and lonely though his life had been, this Samoan bay was endeared to him by a thousand pleasant memories and even by the recollection of his past

unhappiness. Here he had found peace and love, freedom from taskmasters, scenes more beautiful than any picture, and, not least, a sufficiency to eat. A little money and his life might have been tolerable, even happy—enough money for a good-sized boat, a cow or two, and those six acres of the Pascoe estate he had so often longed to buy. Only the month before the American consul had offered them for two hundred dollars Chile money, and here he was with two hundred and fifty pounds in his pocket, seventeen hundred and fifty dollars currency! Cruel fate, that had made him in one turn of her wrist far too rich to care. He would buy them for Leata, he supposed; he must leave the girl some land to live on. But where now were all the day-dreams of the laying out of his little estate?—the damming of the noisy stream, the fencing, terracing, and path-making he had had in mind; the mangoes, oranges, and avocados he had meant to plant in that teeming soil, with coffee enough for a modest reserve? What a snug, cosy garden a man could make of it! What a satisfaction it might have been! How often had he talked of it with Leata, who had been no less eager than himself to harness their quarter-acre to the six and make of them all a little paradise.

Poor Leata! whom he had taken so lightly from her father's house and paid for in gunpowder and kegs of beef —his smiling, soft-eyed Leata, who would have died for him! What was to become of her in this new arrangement of things? The six acres would provide for her, of course; in breadfruit, cocoanuts, and bananas she would not be badly off: but where was the solace for the ache in her heart, for her desolation and abandonment? He sighed as he thought of her, the truest friend he had found in all his wanderings. He would get her some jewellery from Apia, and a chest of new dresses, and a big musical box, if she fancied it. What would it matter if he did go home

in the steerage? It would be no hardship to a man like him. She would soon forget him, no doubt, and take up with somebody else, and live happily ever afterwards in the six acres. Ah, well! he mustn't think too much about her, or it would take the edge off his high spirits and spoil the happiest day of his life.

By this time he had worked quite round the bay, and almost without knowing it he found himself in front of Paul Engelbert's store. Engelbert was the other trader in Vaiala—a passionate, middle-aged Prussian, who had been a good friend of his before those seven breadfruit-trees had come between them. In his new-found affluence and consequent good-humor the bitterness of that old feud suddenly passed away. He recalled Engelbert's rough, jovial kindness—remembered how Paul had cared for him through the fever, and helped him afterwards with money and trade. How could he have been so petty as to make a quarrel of those breadfruit-trees? He recollected, with indescribable wonder at himself, that he had once drawn a pistol on the old fellow, and all this over six feet of boundary and seven gnawed breadfruits! By Jove! he could afford to be generous and hold out the right hand of friendship. Poor old Paul! it was a shame they had not spoken these two years.

On the verandah, barefoot and in striped pyjamas, was Engelbert, pretending not to see him. Kinross thought he looked old and sick and not a little changed.

"How do you do, Engelbert?" he said.

The German looked at him with smouldering eyes. "Gan't you see I'm busy?" he said.

"You might offer a man a chair," said Kinross, seating himself on the tool-chest.

"Dere iss no jare for dem dat issn't welgome," said the German.

"I used to be welcome here," said Kinross. "There was a time when you were a precious good friend of mine, Paul Engelbert."

"Dat wass long ago," said the trader.

"I've been thinking," said Kinross, "that I've acted like a damned fool about those trees."

"Dat wass what I was dinking, too, dese two dree years," responded the other.

"Take them; they are yours," said Kinross. "You can build your fence there to-morrow."

"So!" said Engelbert, with dawning intelligence. "The Yerman gonsul has at last to my gomplaint listened."

"Hang the German consul! No!" cried Kinross. "I do it myself, because I was wrong—because you were good to me that time I was sick, and lent me the hundred dollars and the trade."

"And you want noding?" asked Engelbert, still incredulous.

"I want to shake your hand and be friends again, old man," said Kinross, "same as we used to be when we played dominoes every night, and you'd tell me about the Austrian War, and how the Prince divided his cigars with you when you were wounded."

The German looked away. "Oh, Kinross," he said, with a shining look in his eyes, "you make me much ashamed." He turned suddenly round and wrung the Englishman's hand in an iron grasp. "I, too, was dam fool."

"A friend is worth more than seven breadfruits," said Kinross.

"It wass not breadfruid: it wass brincible," said the German. "Poof! de drees dey are noding; here it wass I wass hurted," and he laid a heavy paw against his breast. "Ho, Malia, de beer!"

His strapping native wife appeared with bottles and mugs; at the sight of their guest she could scarcely conceal her surprise.

"Prosit!" said Engelbert, touching glasses.

"You know dem six agers of de Pasgoe estate," he said, looking very hard at his companion. "Very nice leetle place, very sheap, yoost behind your store?"

Kinross nodded, but his face fell in spite of himself.

"I from the American gonsul bought him," went on the German, "very sheap: two hundred dollars Chile money."

Kinross looked black. Engelbert patted his hand and smiled ambiguously.

"Dey are yours," he said. "Pay me back when you have de money. I buy dem only to spite you. *My friend,* take dem."

"Paul, Paul," cried Kinross, "I don't know what to say—how to thank you. Only this morning I got money from home, and the first thing I meant to do was to buy them."

"All de better," said Engelbert; "and, my boy, you blant goffee. Cobrah, poof! Gotton, poof! It's de goffee dat bays, and I will get you blenty leetle drees from my friend, de gaptain in Utumabu Blantation. You must go? So? Yoost one glass beer. Nein? I will be round lader."

Kinross tore himself away with difficulty and started homeward, his heart swelling with kindness for the old Prussian. He exulted in the six acres he had so nearly lost, and they now seemed to him more precious than ever. It was no empty promise, that of the coffee-trees from Utumapu; these would save him all manner of preparatory labor and put his little plantation six months ahead. Then he remembered he was leaving Vaiala, and again he heard the hum of London in his ears. Well, he would explain

about the trees to Leata, and would beg old Engelbert to help and advise her a bit. Poor Leata! she had lots of good sense and was very quick to learn. He could trust Leata.

He was crossing the *malae*, or common, of Polapola, when the sight of the chief's house put a new thought into his head. It was Tangaloa's house, and he could see the chief himself bulking dimly in the shadow of a *siapo*. Tangaloa! He hadn't spoken with him in a year. The old fellow had been good to him, and in the beginning had overwhelmed him with kindness. But that was before he had shot the chief's dog and brought about the feud that had existed between them for so long. It was annoying to have that everlasting dog on his verandah at night, frightening Leata to death and spilling the improvised larder all about the floor, not to speak of the chickens it had eaten and the eggs it had sucked. No, he could not blame himself for having shot that beast of a dog! But it had made bad blood between him and Tangaloa, and had cost him, in one way or another, through the loss of the old chief's custom and influence, the value of a thousand chickens. But he would make it up with Tangaloa, for he meant to leave no man's ill-will behind him. So he walked deliberately towards the house, and slipped under the eaves near the place where the old chief was sitting alone.

"*Talofa*, Tangaloa," he cried out cordially, shaking hands.

The chief responded somewhat dryly to the salutation and assumed a vacant expression.

"That dog!" began the trader.

"That dog!" repeated the chief, with counterfeit surprise.

"Thy dog, the one I shot near my house," said Kinross, firing up with the memory of its misdeeds, "the dog that

chased my chickens, and ate my eggs, and plagued me all night like a forest devil—I want to take counsel with your Highness about it."

"But it is dead," said Tangaloa.

"But thy high-chief anger is not dead," said Kinross. "Behold, I used to be like your son, and the day was no longer than thy love for me. I am overcome with sorrow to remember the years that are gone, and now to live together as we do in enmity. What is the value of thy dog, that I may pay thee for it, and what present can I make besides that will turn thy heart towards me again?"

"Cease," said the chief; "there was no worth to the dog, and I have no anger against thee, Kinilosi."

"You mock at me, Tangaloa," said Kinross. "There is anger in thine eyes even as thou speakest to me."

"Great was my love for that dog," said the chief. "It licked my face when I lay wounded on the battle-ground. If I whistled it came to me, so wise was it and loving; and if I were sick it would not eat."

"Weighty is my shame and pain," said the trader. "Would that I had never lifted my gun against it! But I will pay thee its worth and make thee a present besides."

"Impossible," said Tangaloa. "When the cocoanut is split, who can make it whole?"

"One can always get a new cocoanut," said Kinross. "I will buy thee the best dog in Apia, a high chief of a dog, clever like a consul, and with a bark melodious as a musical box."

At this Tangaloa laughed for the first time. "And what about thy chickens?" he demanded, "and thy things to eat hung out at night?"

"It can eat all the chickens it likes," returned Kinross, "and I will feed it daily, also, with salt beef and sardines, if that will make us friends again, your Highness."

"Cease, Kinilosi; I am thy friend already," said Tangaloa, extending his hand. "It is forgotten about the dog, and lo, the anger is buried."

"And the price?" inquired Kinross.

"One cannot buy friendship or barter loving-kindness," said Tangaloa. "Again I tell thee there is no price. But if thou wouldst care to give me a bottle of kerosene, for the lack of which I am sore distressed these nights—well, I should be very glad."

"I shall be pleased indeed," said the trader, who of a sudden assumed an intent, listening attitude.

"What is the matter?" demanded Tangaloa.

"Sh-sh!" exclaimed the white man.

"There is nothing," said the chief.

"Yes, yes," said Kinross; "listen, your Highness! A faint, faint bark like that of a spirit dog."

"Oh," said the chief, looking about uneasily.

"Dost thee not hear it?" cried Kinross, incredulously. "To me it is clear like the mission bell, thus: 'Bow-wow-wow-give-also-some-sugar-and-some-tea-and-some-tobacco-to-his-Highness-Tangaloa-bow-wow-wow!'"

The old chief fairly beamed. "Blessed was my dog in life, and blessed in death also!" he cried. "Behold, Kinilosi, he also barks about a few fish-hooks in a bag, and for a small subscription to our new church."

"I think he says fifty cents," said Kinross.

"No, no," cried the chief; "it was like this—quite plain: 'One-dollar-one-dollar!'"

"That ends it," said Kinross. "I must haste to obey the voice of the spirit dog. Good-bye, your Highness."

"Good-bye, Kinilosi," returned the chief, warmly. "I laugh and talk jestingly, but my heart—"

"Mine also," added Kinross, quickly, again grasping the old man's hand.

He strode off with a light step, in a glow of enthusiasm and high spirits. It would be hard to leave the old village, after all. He might travel far and not find hearts more generous or kindly, and he vowed he would never forget his Samoans—no, if he lived a thousand years. And if, after all, the new order of things should fail to please, and he should find himself stifled by the civilization to which he had been so long a stranger, could he not always return to this little paradise, and live out the number of his days in perennial content? He would search for some savings-bank in London, and place there to his credit a sum large enough to ship him back to the Islands. Whatever the pinch, it should lie there untouched and sacred; and as he toiled in the stern, gray land of his birth, the thought of that secret hoard would always be a comfort to him. But what if the bank should break, as banks do in those centres of the high civilization, and he should find himself stranded half the world away from the place he loved so dearly? He shivered at the thought. There should be two hoards, in two banks, or else he would feel continually uneasy. The line to the rear must be kept open at any cost.

He found Leata sitting on the floor, spelling out "The Good News from New Guinea" in the missionary magazine. She was fresh from her bath, and her black, damp hair was outspread to the sunshine to dry. She rippled with smiles at his approach, and it seemed to him she had never looked more radiant and engaging. He sat down beside her, and pressed her curly hair against his lips and kissed it. How was it that such a little savage could appear to him more alluring than any white woman he had ever seen? Was he bewitched? He looked at her critically, dispassionately, and marvelled at the perfection of her wild young beauty, marvelled, too, at her elegance and delicacy. And for heart and tenderness, where was her match in all

the seas? He threw his arm round her and kissed her on the lips.

"Of all things in the world, what wouldst thou like the most, Leata?" he asked.

"To have thee always near me, Kinilosi," she answered. "Before, I had no understanding and was like the black people in the missionary book, but now my heart is pained, so full it is with love."

"But there are other things than love," persisted Kinross. "Ear-rings, musical boxes, print for dresses."

"Yes, many things," she said. "But I trouble not myself about them, Kinilosi. But sometimes I think of the land behind our house and the fine plantation we will make there some day."

"But if I gave you a little bag of gold shillings," he said, "and took thee to Apia, my pigeon, what wouldst thou buy?"

"First I would give ten dollars to the new church," she began. "Then for my father I would buy an umbrella, and a shiny bag in which he could carry his cartridges and tobacco when he goes to war. For my mother, also, an umbrella and a picture-book like that of the missionary's, with photographs of Queen Victoria and captains of men-of-war. For my sister a Bible and a hymn-book, and for my brother a little pigeon gun."

"O thou foolish Leata," said Kinross, "and nothing for thyself?"

"There is still more in my bag," she answered, "enough for a golden locket and a golden chain. And in the locket there will be your picture and a lock of your hair—like the one the naval officer gave Titi's sister; and when I die, lo, no one shall touch it, for it shall lie on my breast in the grave!"

"To-morrow we shall go to Apia and buy them," said

Kinross. "This morning the pastor brought me a letter from Britain with a present of many dollars. The six acres I have already purchased, and in Apia I shall get prickly wire for fencing, and many things we need for the clearing and planting of the land."

Leata clapped her hands for joy. "Oh, Kinilosi," she cried, "it was breaking my heart. I feared the letter would make thee return to the White Country!"

Kinross looked at her with great gentleness. His resolution was taken, be it for good or evil.

"I shall never go back," he said.

Then in a rousing voice he cried, so loudly that the natives in the neighboring houses started at the sound: "In Vaiala shall I live, and in Vaiala die!"

XIII

THE WHITE SILENCE

BY

Jack London

The White Silence

Jack London

"CARMEN won't last more than a couple of days." Mason spat out a chunk of ice and surveyed the poor animal ruefully, then put her foot in his mouth and proceeded to bite out the ice which clustered cruelly between the toes.

"I never saw a dog with a highfalutin' name that ever was worth a rap," he said, as he concluded his task and shoved her aside. "They just fade away and die under the responsibility. Did ye ever see one go wrong with a sensible name like Cassiar, Siwash, or Husky? No, sir! Take a look at Shookum here; he's—"

Snap! The lean brute flashed up, the white teeth just missing Mason's throat.

"Ye will, will ye?" A shrewd clout behind the ear with the butt of the dogwhip stretched the animal in the snow, quivering softly, a yellow slaver dripping from its fangs.

"As I was saying, just look at Shookum, here—he's got the spirit. Bet ye he eats Carmen before the week's out."

"I'll bank another proposition against that," replied Malemute Kid, reversing the frozen bread placed before the fire to thaw. "We'll eat Shookum before the trip is over. What d' ye say, Ruth?"

The Indian woman settled the coffee with a piece of ice,

[1] From *The Son of the Wolf*. Copyright, 1900, by Jack London. Houghton Mifflin Co.

glanced from Malemute Kid to her husband, then at the dogs, but vouchsafed no reply. It was such a palpable truism that none was necessary. Two hundred miles of unbroken trail in prospect, with a scant six days' grub for themselves and none for the dogs, could admit no other alternative. The two men and the woman grouped about the fire and began their meagre meal. The dogs lay in their harnesses, for it was a midday halt, and watched each mouthful enviously.

"No more lunches after to-day," said Malemute Kid. "And we've got to keep a close eye on the dogs,—they're getting vicious. They'd just as soon pull a fellow down as not, if they get a chance."

"And I was president of an Epworth once, and taught in the Sunday-school." Having irrelevantly delivered himself of this, Mason fell into a dreamy contemplation of his steaming moccasins, but was aroused by Ruth filling his cup. "Thank God, we've got slathers of tea! I've seen it growing, down in Tennessee. What wouldn't I give for a hot corn-pone just now! Never mind, Ruth; you won't starve much longer, nor wear moccasins either."

The woman threw off her gloom at this, and in her eyes welled up a great love for her white lord,—the first white man she had ever seen,—the first man she had known to treat a woman as something better than a mere animal or beast of burden.

"Yes, Ruth," continued her husband, having recourse to the macaronic jargon in which it was alone possible for them to understand each other; "wait till we clean up and pull for the Outside. We'll take the White Man's canoe and go to the Salt Water. Yes, bad water, rough water,—great mountains dance up and down all the time. And so big, so far, so far away,—you travel ten sleep, twenty sleep, forty sleep" (he graphically enumerated the

days on his fingers), "all the time water, bad water. Then you come to great village, plenty people, just the same mosquitoes next summer. Wigwams oh, so high,—ten, twenty pines. Hi-yu skookum!"

He paused impotently, cast an appealing glance at Malemute Kid, then laboriously placed the twenty pines, end on end, by sign language. Malemute Kid smiled with cheery cynicism; but Ruth's eyes were wide with wonder, and with pleasure; for she half believed he was joking, and such condescension pleased her poor woman's heart.

"And then you step into a—a box, and pouf! up you go." He tossed his empty cup in the air by way of illustration, and as he deftly caught it, cried: "And biff! down you come. Oh, great medicine-men! You go Fort Yukon, I go Arctic City,—twenty-five sleep,—big string, all the time,—I catch him string,—I say, 'Hello, Ruth! How are ye?'—and you say, 'Is that my good husband?'—and I say 'Yes,'—and you say, 'No can bake good bread, no more soda,'—then I say, 'Look in cache, under flour; good-by.' You look and catch plenty soda. All the time you Fort Yukon, me Arctic City. Hi-yu medicine-man!"

Ruth smiled so ingenuously at the fairy story that both men burst into laughter. A row among the dogs cut short the wonders of the Outside, and by the time the snarling combatants were separated, she had lashed the sleds and all was ready for the trail.

"Mush! Baldy! Hi! Mush on!" Mason worked his whip smartly, and as the dogs whined low in the traces, broke out the sled with the gee-pole. Ruth followed with the second team, leaving Malemute Kid, who had helped her start, to bring up the rear. Strong man, brute that he was, capable of felling an ox at a blow, he could not bear to beat the poor animals, but humored them as a dog-

driver rarely does,—nay, almost wept with them in their misery.

"Come, mush on there, you poor sore-footed brutes!" he murmured, after several ineffectual attempts to start the load. But his patience was at last rewarded, and though whimpering with pain, they hastened to join their fellows.

No more conversation; the toil of the trail will not permit such extravagance. And of all deadening labors, that of the Northland trail is the worst. Happy is the man who can weather a day's travel at the price of silence, and that on a beaten track.

And of all heart-breaking labors, that of breaking trail is the worst. At every step the great webbed shoe sinks till the snow is level with the knee. Then up, straight up, the deviation of a fraction of an inch being a certain precursor of disaster, the snowshoe must be lifted till the surface is cleared; then forward, down, and the other foot is raised perpendicularly for the matter of half a yard. He who tries this for the first time, if haply he avoids bringing his shoes in dangerous propinquity and measures not his length on the treacherous footing, will give up exhausted at the end of a hundred yards; he who can keep out of the way of the dogs for a whole day may well crawl into his sleeping-bag with a clear conscience and a pride which passeth all understanding; and he who travels twenty sleeps on the Long Trail is a man whom the gods may envy.

The afternoon wore on, and with the awe, born of the White Silence, the voiceless travellers bent to their work. Nature has many tricks wherewith she convinces man of his finity,—the ceaseless flow of the tides, the fury of the storm, the shock of the earthquake, the long roll of heaven's artillery,—but the most tremendous, the most stupefying

of all, is the passive phase of the White Silence. All movement ceases, the sky clears, the heavens are as brass; the slightest whisper seems sacrilege, and man becomes timid, affrighted at the sound of his own voice. Sole speck of life journeying across the ghostly wastes of a dead world, he trembles at his audacity, realizes that his is a maggot's life, nothing more. Strange thoughts arise unsummoned, and the mystery of all things strives for utterance. And the fear of death, of God, of the universe, comes over him, —the hope of the Resurrection and the Life, the yearning for immortality, the vain striving of the imprisoned essence,—it is then, if ever, man walks alone with God.

So wore the day away. The river took a great bend, and Mason headed his team for the cut-off across the narrow neck of land. But the dogs balked at the high bank. Again and again, though Ruth and Malemute Kid were shoving on the sled, they slipped back. Then came the concerted effort. The miserable creatures, weak from hunger, exerted their last strength. Up—up—the sled poised on the top of the bank; but the leader swung the string of dogs behind him to the right, fouling Mason's snowshoes. The result was grievous. Mason was whipped off his feet; one of the dogs fell in the traces; and the sled toppled back, dragging everything to the bottom again.

Slash! the whip fell among the dogs savagely, especially upon the one which had fallen.

"Don't, Mason," entreated Malemute Kid; "the poor devil's on its last legs. Wait, and we'll put my team on."

Mason deliberately withheld the whip till the last word had fallen, then out flashed the long lash, completely curling about the offending creature's body. Carmen—for it was Carmen—cowered in the snow, cried piteously, then rolled over on her side.

It was a tragic moment, a pitiful incident of the trail,—

a dying dog, two comrades in anger. Ruth glanced solicitously from man to man. But Malemute Kid restrained himself, though there was a world of reproach in his eyes, and bending over the dog, cut the traces. No word was spoken. The teams were double-spanned and the difficulty overcome; the sleds were under way again, the dying dog dragging herself along in the rear. As long as an animal can travel, it is not shot, and this last chance is accorded it,—the crawling into camp, if it can, in the hope of a moose being killed.

Already penitent for his angry action, but too stubborn to make amends, Mason toiled on at the head of the cavalcade, little dreaming that danger hovered in the air. The timber clustered thick in the sheltered bottom, and through this they threaded their way. Fifty feet or more from the trail towered a lofty pine. For generations it had stood there, and for generations destiny had had this one end in view,—perhaps the same had been decreed of Mason.

He stooped to fasten the loosened thong of his moccasin. The sleds came to a halt, and the dogs lay down in the snow without a whimper. The stillness was weird; not a breath rustled the frost-encrusted forest; the cold and silence of outer space had chilled the heart and smote the trembling lips of nature. A sigh pulsed through the air,—they did not seem to actually hear it, but rather felt it, like the premonition of movement in a motionless void. Then the great tree, burdened with its weight of years and snow, played its last part in the tragedy of life. He heard the warning crash and attempted to spring up, but, almost erect, caught the blow squarely on the shoulder.

The sudden danger, the quick death,—how often had Malemute Kid faced it! The pine-needles were still quivering as he gave his commands and sprang into action.

Nor did the Indian girl faint or raise her voice in idle wailing, as might many of her white sisters. At his order, she threw her weight on the end of a quickly extemporized handspike, easing the pressure and listening to her husband's groans. while Malemute Kid attacked the tree with his axe. The steel rang merrily as it bit into the frozen trunk, each stroke being accompanied by a forced, audible respiration, the "Huh!" "Huh!" of the woodsman.

At last the Kid laid the pitiable thing that was once a man in the snow. But worse than his comrade's pain was the dumb anguish in the woman's face, the blended look of hopeful, hopeless query. Little was said; those of the Northland are early taught the futility of words and the inestimable value of deeds. With the temperature at sixty-five below zero, a man cannot lie many minutes in the snow and live. So the sled-lashings were cut, and the sufferer, rolled in furs, laid on a couch of boughs. Before him roared a fire. built of the very wood which wrought the mishap. Behind and partially over him was stretched the primitive fly,—a piece of canvas, which caught the radiating heat and threw it back and down upon him,—a trick which men may know who study physics at the fount.

And men who have shared their bed with death know when the call is sounded. Mason was terribly crushed. The most cursory examination revealed it. His right arm, leg, and back were broken; his limbs were paralyzed from the hips; and the likelihood of internal injuries was large. An occasional moan was his only sign of life.

No hope; nothing to be done. The pitiless night crept slowly by,—Ruth's portion, the despairing stoicism of her race, and Malemute Kid adding new lines to his face of bronze. In fact, Mason suffered least of all, for he spent his time in Eastern Tennessee, in the Great Smoky Moun-

tains, living over the scenes of his childhood. And most pathetic was the melody of his long-forgotten Southern vernacular, as he raved of swimming-holes and coon-hunts and watermelon raids. It was as Greek to Ruth, but the Kid understood and felt,—felt as only one can feel who has been shut out for years from all that civilization means.

Morning brought consciousness to the stricken man, and Malemute Kid bent closer to catch his whispers.

"You remember when we foregathered on the Tanana, four years come next ice-run? I didn't care so much for her then. It was more like she was pretty, and there was a smack of excitement about it, I think. But d' ye know, I've come to think a heap of her. She's been a good wife to me, always at my shoulder in the pinch. And when it comes to trading, you know there isn't her equal. D' ye recollect the time she shot the Moosehorn Rapids to pull you and me off that rock, the bullets whipping the water like hailstones?—and the time of the famine at Nuklukyeto?—or when she raced the ice-run to bring the news? Yes, she's been a good wife to me, better 'n that other one. Didn't know I'd been there? Never told you, eh? Well, I tried it once, down in the States. That's why I'm here. Been raised together, too. I came away to give her a chance for divorce. She got it.

"But that's got nothing to do with Ruth. I had thought of cleaning up and pulling for the Outside next year,—her and I,—but it's too late. Don't send her back to her people, Kid. It's beastly hard for a woman to go back. Think of it!—nearly four years on our bacon and beans and flour and dried fruit, and then to go back to her fish and caribou. It's not good for her to have tried our ways, to come to know they're better 'n her people's, and then return to them. Take care of her, Kid,—why don't you,—but no, you always fought shy of them,—and you never

told me why you came to this country. Be kind to her, and send her back to the States as soon as you can. But fix it so as she can come back,—liable to get homesick, you know.

"And the youngster—it's drawn us closer, Kid. I only hope it is a boy. Think of it!—flesh of my flesh, Kid. He mustn't stop in this country. And if it's a girl, why she can't. Sell my furs; they'll fetch at least five thousand, and I've got as much more with the company. And handle my interests with yours. I think that bench claim will show up. See that he gets a good schooling; and Kid, above all, don't let him come back. This country was not made for white men.

"I'm a gone man, Kid. Three or four sleeps at the best. You've got to go on. You must go on! Remember, it's my wife, it's my boy,—O God! I hope it's a boy! You can't stay by me,—and I charge you, a dying man, to pull on."

"Give me three days," pleaded Malemute Kid. "You may change for the better; something may turn up."

"No."

"Just three days."

"You must pull on."

"Two days."

"It's my wife and my boy, Kid. You would not ask it."

"One day."

"No, no! I charge—"

"Only one day. We can shave it through on the grub, and I might knock over a moose."

"No,—all right; one day, but not a minute more. And Kid, don't—don't leave me to face it alone. Just a shot, one pull on the trigger. You understand. Think of it! Think of it! Flesh of my flesh, and I'll never live to see him!

"Send Ruth here. I want to say good-by and tell her that she must think of the boy and not wait till I'm dead. She might refuse to go with you if I didn't. Good-by, old man; good-by.

"Kid! I say—a—sink a hole above the pup, next to the slide. I panned out forty cents on my shovel there.

"And Kid!" he stooped lower to catch the last faint words, the dying man's surrender of his pride. "I'm sorry —for—you know—Carmen."

Leaving the girl crying softly over her man, Malemute Kid slipped into his *parka* and snowshoes, tucked his rifle under his arm, and crept away into the forest. He was no tyro in the stern sorrows of the Northland, but never had he faced so stiff a problem as this. In the abstract, it was a plain, mathematical proposition,—three possible lives as against one doomed one. But now he hesitated. For five years, shoulder to shoulder, on the rivers and trails, in the camps and mines, facing death by field and flood and famine, had they knitted the bonds of their comradeship. So close was the tie that he had often been conscious of a vague jealousy of Ruth from the first time she had come between. And now it must be severed by his own hand.

Though he prayed for a moose, just one moose, all game seemed to have deserted the land, and nightfall found the exhausted man crawling into camp, light-handed, heavy-hearted. An uproar from the dogs and shrill cries from Ruth hastened him.

Bursting into the camp, he saw the girl in the midst of the snarling pack, laying about her with an axe. The dogs had broken the iron rule of their masters and were rushing the grub. He joined the issue with his rifle reversed, and the hoary game of natural selection was played out with all the ruthlessness of its primeval environment.

Rifle and axe went up and down, hit or missed with monotonous regularity; lithe bodies flashed, with wild eyes and dripping fangs; and man and beast fought for supremacy to the bitterest conclusion. Then the beaten brutes crept to the edge of the firelight, licking their wounds, voicing their misery to the stars.

The whole stock of dried salmon had been devoured, and perhaps five pounds of flour remained to tide them over two hundred miles of wilderness. Ruth returned to her husband, while Malemute Kid cut up the warm body of one of the dogs, the skull of which had been crushed by the axe. Every portion was carefully put away, save the hide and offal, which were cast to his fellows of the moment before.

Morning brought fresh trouble. The animals were turning on each other. Carmen, who still clung to her slender thread of life, was downed by the pack. The lash fell among them unheeded. They cringed and cried under the blows, but refused to scatter till the last wretched bit had disappeared,—bones, hide, hair, everything.

Malemute Kid went about his work, listening to Mason, who was back in Tennessee, delivering tangled discourses and wild exhortations to his brethren of other days.

Taking advantage of neighboring pines, he worked rapidly, and Ruth watched him make a cache similar to those sometimes used by hunters to preserve their meat from the wolverines and dogs. One after the other, he bent the tops of two small pines toward each other and nearly to the ground, making them fast with thongs of moosehide. Then he beat the dogs into submission and harnessed them to two of the sleds, loading the same with everything but the furs which enveloped Mason. These he wrapped and lashed tightly about him, fastening either end of the robes to the bent pines. A single stroke of his

hunting-knife would release them and send the body high in the air.

Ruth had received her husband's last wishes and made no struggle. Poor girl, she had learned the lesson of obedience well. From a child, she had bowed, and seen all women bow, to the lords of creation, and it did not seem in the nature of things for woman to resist. The Kid permitted her one outburst of grief, as she kissed her husband,—her own people had no such custom,—then led her to the foremost sled and helped her into her snowshoes. Blindly, instinctively, she took the gee-pole and whip, and "mushed" the dogs out on the trail. Then he returned to Mason, who had fallen into a coma; and long after she was out of sight, crouched by the fire, waiting, hoping, praying for his comrade to die.

It is not pleasant to be alone with painful thoughts in the White Silence. The silence of gloom is merciful, shrouding one as with protection and breathing a thousand intangible sympathies; but the bright White Silence, clear and cold, under steely skies, is pitiless.

An hour passed,—two hours,—but the man would not die. At high noon, the sun, without raising its rim above the southern horizon, threw a suggestion of fire athwart the heavens, then quickly drew it back. Malemute Kid roused and dragged himself to his comrade's side. He cast one glance about him. The White Silence seemed to sneer, and a great fear came upon him. There was a sharp report; Mason swung into his aerial sepulchre; and Malemute Kid lashed the dogs into a wild gallop as he fled across the snow.

XIV

THE HIDING OF BLACK BILL

BY

O. Henry

The Hiding of Black Bill[1]

O. Henry

A LANK, strong, red-faced man with a Wellington beak and small, fiery eyes tempered by flaxen lashes, sat on the station platform at Los Pinos swinging his legs to and fro. At his side sat another man, fat, melancholy, and seedy, who seemed to be his friend. They had the appearance of men to whom life had appeared as a reversible coat—seamy on both sides.

"Ain't seen you in about four years, Ham," said the seedy man. "Which way you been travelling?"

"Texas," said the red-faced man. "It was too cold in Alaska for me. And I found it warm in Texas. I'll tell you about one hot spell I went through there.

"One morning I steps off the International at a water-tank and lets it go on without me. 'Twas a ranch country, and fuller of spite-houses than New York City. Only out there they build 'em twenty miles away so you can't smell what they've got for dinner, instead of running 'em up two inches from their neighbors' windows.

"There wasn't any roads in sight, so I footed it 'cross country. The grass was shoe-top deep, and the mesquite timber looked just like a peach orchard. It was so much like a gentleman's private estate that every minute you expected a kennelful of bulldogs to run out and bite you.

[1] From *Options*. Copyright, 1909, by Harper & Brothers.

But I must have walked twenty miles before I came in sight of a ranch-house. It was a little one, about as big as an elevated-railroad station.

"There was a little man in a white shirt and brown overalls and a pink handkerchief around his neck rolling cigarettes under a tree in front of the door.

"'Greetings,' says I. 'Any refreshment, welcome, emoluments, or even work, for a comparative stranger?'

"'Oh, come in,' says he, in a refined tone. 'Sit down on that stool, please. I didn't hear your horse coming.'

"'He isn't near enough yet,' says I. 'I walked. I don't want to be a burden, but I wonder if you have three or four gallons of water handy.'

"'You do look pretty dusty,' says he; 'but our bathing arrangements—'

"'It's a drink I want,' says I. 'Never mind the dust that's on the outside.'

"He gets me a dipper of water out of a red jar hanging up, and then goes on:

"'Do you want work?'

"'For a time,' says I. 'This is a rather quiet section of the country, isn't it?'

"'It is,' says he. 'Sometimes—so I have been told—one sees no human being pass for weeks at a time. I've been here only a month. I bought the ranch from an old settler who wanted to move farther west.'

"'It suits me,' says I. 'Quiet and retirement are good for a man sometimes. And I need a job. I can tend bar, salt mines, lecture, float stock, do a little middle-weight slugging, and play the piano.'

"'Can you herd sheep?' asks the little ranchman.

"'Do you mean *have* I heard sheep?' says I.

"'Can you herd 'em—take charge of a flock of 'em?' says he.

"'Oh,' says I, 'now I understand. You mean chase 'em around and bark at 'em like collie dogs. Well, I might,' says I. 'I've never exactly done any sheep-herding, but I've often seen 'em from car windows masticating daisies, and they don't look dangerous.'

"'I'm short a herder,' says the ranchman. 'You never can depend on the Mexicans. I've only got two flocks. You may take out my bunch of muttons—there are only eight hundred of 'em—in the morning, if you like. The pay is twelve dollars a month and your rations furnished. You camp in a tent on the prairie with your sheep. You do your own cooking, but wood and water are brought to your camp. It's an easy job.'

"'I'm on,' says I. 'I'll take the job even if I have to garland my brow and hold on to a crook and wear a loose-effect and play on a pipe like the shepherds do in pictures.'

"So the next morning the little ranchman helps me drive the flock of muttons from the corral to about two miles out and let 'em graze on a little hillside on the prairie. He gives me a lot of instructions about not letting bunches of them stray off from the herd, and driving 'em down to a water-hole to drink at noon.

"'I'll bring out your tent and camping outfit and rations in the buckboard before night,' says he.

"'Fine,' says I. 'And don't forget the rations. Nor the camping outfit. And be sure to bring the tent. Your name's Zollicoffer, ain't it?'

"'My name,' says he, 'is Henry Ogden.'

"'All right, Mr. Ogden,' says I. 'Mine is Mr. Percival Saint Clair.'

"I herded sheep for five days on the Rancho Chiquito; and then the wool entered my soul. That getting next to Nature certainly got next to me. I was lonesomer than Crusoe's goat. I've seen a lot of persons more entertain-

ing as companions than those sheep were. I'd drive 'em to the corral and pen 'em every evening, and then cook my corn-bread and mutton and coffee, and lie down in a tent the size of a table-cloth, and listen to the coyotes and whippoorwills singing around the camp.

"The fifth evening, after I had corralled my costly but uncongenial muttons, I walked over to the ranch-house and stepped in the door.

"'Mr. Ogden,' says I, 'you and me have got to get sociable. Sheep are all very well to dot the landscape and furnish eight-dollar cotton suitings for man, but for table-talk and fireside companions they rank along with five-o'clock teazers. If you've got a deck of cards, or a parcheesi outfit, or a game of authors, get 'em out, and let's get on a mental basis. I've got to do something in an intellectual line, if it's only to knock somebody's brains out.'

"This Henry Ogden was a peculiar kind of ranchman. He wore finger-rings and a big gold watch and careful neckties. And his face was calm, and his nose-spectacles was kept very shiny. I saw once, in Muscogee, an outlaw hung for murdering six men, who was a dead ringer for him. But I knew a preacher in Arkansas that you would have taken to be his brother. I didn't care much for him either way; what I wanted was some fellowship and communion with holy saints or lost sinners—anything sheepless would do.

"'Well, Saint Clair,' says he, laying down the book he was reading, 'I guess it must be pretty lonesome for you at first. And I don't deny that it's monotonous for me. Are you sure you corralled your sheep so they won't stray out?'

"'They're shut up as tight as the jury of a millionaire murderer,' says I. 'And I'll be back with them long before they'll need their trained nurse.'

"So Ogden digs up a deck of cards, and we play casino. After five days and nights of my sheep-camp it was like a toot on Broadway. When I caught big casino I felt as excited as if I had made a million in Trinity. And when H. O. loosened up a little and told the story about the lady in the Pullman car I laughed for five minutes.

"That showed what a comparative thing life is. A man may see so much that he'd be bored to turn his head to look at a $3,000,000 fire or Joe Weber or the Adriatic Sea. But let him herd sheep for a spell, and you'll see him splitting his ribs laughing at 'Curfew Shall Not Ring To-night,' or really enjoying himself playing cards with ladies.

"By-and-by Ogden gets out a decanter of Bourbon, and then there is a total eclipse of sheep.

"'Do you remember reading in the papers, about a month ago,' says he, 'about a train hold-up on the M. K. & T.? The express agent was shot through the shoulder, and about $15,000 in currency taken. And it's said that only one man did the job.'

"'Seems to me I do,' says I. 'But such things happen so often they don't linger long in the human Texas mind. Did they overtake, overhaul, seize, or lay hands upon the despoiler?'

"'He escaped,' says Ogden. 'And I was just reading in a paper to-day that the officers have tracked him down into this part of the country. It seems the bills the robber got were all the first issue of currency to the Second National Bank of Espinosa City. And so they've followed the trail where they've been spent, and it leads this way.'

"Ogden pours out some more Bourbon, and shoves me the bottle.

"'I imagine,' says I, after ingurgitating another modicum of the royal boose, 'that it wouldn't be at all a disingenu-

ous idea for a train-robber to run down into this part of the country to hide for a spell. A sheep-ranch, now,' says I, 'would be the finest kind of a place. Who'd ever expect to find such a desperate character among these song-birds and muttons and wild flowers? And, by the way,' says I, kind of looking H. Ogden over, 'was there any description mentioned of this single-handed terror? Was his lineaments or height and thickness or teeth fillings or style of habiliments set forth in print?'

"'Why, no,' says Ogden; 'they say nobody got a good sight of him because he wore a mask. But they know it was a train-robber called Black Bill, because he always works alone and because he dropped a handkerchief in the express-car that had his name on it.'

"'All right,' says I. 'I approve of Black Bill's retreat to the sheep-ranges. I guess they won't find him.'

"'There's one thousand dollars' reward for his capture,' says Ogden.

"'I don't need that kind of money,' says I, looking Mr. Sheepman straight in the eye. 'The twelve dollars a month you pay me is enough. I need a rest, and I can save up until I get enough to pay my fare to Texarkana, where my widowed mother lives. If Black Bill,' I goes on, looking significantly at Ogden, 'was to have come down this way—say, a month ago—and bought a little sheep-ranch and—'

"'Stop,' says Ogden, getting out of his chair and looking pretty vicious. 'Do you mean to insinuate—'

"'Nothing,' says I; 'no insinuations. I'm stating a hypodermical case. I say, if Black Bill had come down here and bought a sheep-ranch and hired me to Little-Boy-Blue 'em and treated me square and friendly, as you've done, he'd never have anything to fear from me. A man is a man, regardless of any complications he may have

with sheep or railroad trains. Now you know where I stand.'

"Ogden looks black as camp-coffee for nine seconds, and then he laughs, amused.

"'You'll do, Saint Clair,' says he. 'If I *was* Black Bill I wouldn't be afraid to trust you. Let's have a game or two of seven-up to-night; that is, if you don't mind playing with a train-robber.'

"'I've told you,' says I, 'my oral sentiments, and there's no strings to 'em.'

"While I was shuffling after the first hand, I asks Ogden, as if the idea was a kind of a casualty, where he was from.

"'Oh,' says he, 'from the Mississippi Valley.'

"'That's a nice little place,' says I. 'I've often stopped over there. But didn't you find the sheets a little damp and the food poor? Now, I hail,' says I, 'from the Pacific Slope. Ever put up there?'

"'Too draughty,' says Ogden. 'But if you're ever in the Middle West just mention my name, and you'll get foot-warmers and dripped coffee.'

"'Well,' says I, 'I wasn't exactly fishing for your private telephone number and the middle name of your aunt that carried off the Cumberland Presbyterian minister. It don't matter. I just want you to know you are safe in the hands of your shepherd. Now, don't play hearts on spades, and don't get nervous.'

"'Still harping,' says Ogden, laughing again. 'Don't you suppose that if I was Black Bill and thought you suspected me, I'd put a Winchester bullet into you and stop my nervousness, if I had any?'

"'Not any,' says I. 'A man who's got the nerve to hold up a train single-handed wouldn't do a trick like that. I've knocked about enough to know that them are the kind of men who put a value on a friend. Not that

I can claim being a friend of yours, Mr. Ogden,' says I, 'being only your sheep-herder; but under more expeditious circumstances we might have been.'

"'Forget the sheep temporarily, I beg,' says Ogden, 'and cut for deal.'

"About four days afterward, while my muttons was nooning on the water-hole and I deep in the interstices of making a pot of coffee, up rides softly on the grass a mysterious person in the garb of the being he wished to represent. He was dressed somewhere between a Kansas City detective, Buffalo Bill, and the town dog-catcher of Baton Rouge. His chin and eye wasn't molded on fighting lines, so I knew he was only a scout.

"'Herdin' sheep?' he asks me.

"'Well,' says I, 'to a man of your evident gumptional endowments, I wouldn't have the nerve to state that I am engaged in decorating old bronzes or oiling bicycle sprockets.'

"'You don't talk or look like a sheep-herder to me,' says he.

"'But you talk like what you look like to me,' says I.

"And then he asks me who I was working for, and I shows him Rancho Chiquito, two miles away, in the shadow of a low hill, and he tells me he's a deputy sheriff.

"'There's a train-robber called Black Bill supposed to be somewhere in these parts,' says the scout. 'He's been traced as far as San Antonio, and maybe farther. Have you seen or heard of any strangers around here during the past month?'

"'I have not,' says I, 'except a report of one over at the Mexican quarters of Loomis' ranch, on the Frio.'

"'What do you know about him?' asks the deputy.

"'He's three days old,' says I.

"'What kind of a looking man is the man you work for?' he asks. 'Does old George Ramey own this place

yet? He's run sheep here for the last ten years, but never had no success.'

"'The old man has sold out and gone West,' I tells him. 'Another sheep-fancier bought him out about a month ago.'

"'What kind of a looking man is he?' asks the deputy again.

"'Oh,' says I, 'a big, fat kind of a Dutchman with long whiskers and blue specs. I don't think he knows a sheep from a ground-squirrel. I guess old George soaked him pretty well on the deal,' says I.

"After indulging himself in a lot more non-communicative information and two-thirds of my dinner, the deputy rides away.

"That night I mentions the matter to Ogden.

"'They're drawing the tendrils of the octopus around Black Bill,' says I. And then I told him about the deputy sheriff, and how I'd described him to the deputy, and what the deputy said about the matter.

"'Oh, well,' says Ogden, 'let's don't borrow any of Black Bill's troubles. We've a few of our own. Get the Bourbon out of the cupboard and we'll drink to his health—unless,' says he, with his little cackling laugh, 'you're prejudiced against train-robbers.'

"'I'll drink,' says I, 'to any man who's a friend to a friend. And I believe that Black Bill,' I goes on, 'would be that. So here's to Black Bill, and may he have good luck.'

"And both of us drank.

"About two weeks later comes shearing-time. The sheep had to be driven up to the ranch, and a lot of frowzy-headed Mexicans would snip the fur off of them with back-action scissors. So the afternoon before the barbers were to come I hustled my underdone muttons over the hill,

across the dell, down by the winding brook, and up to the ranch-house, where I penned 'em in a corral and bade 'em my nightly adieus.

"I went from there to the ranch-house. I find H. Ogden, Esquire, lying asleep on his little cot bed. I guess he had been overcome by anti-insomnia or diswakefulness or some of the diseases peculiar to the sheep business. His mouth and vest were open, and he breathed like a second-hand bicycle pump. I looked at him and gave vent to just a few musings. 'Imperial Cæsar,' says I, 'asleep in such a way, might shut his mouth and keep the wind away.'

"A man asleep is certainly a sight to make angels weep. What good is all his brain, muscle, backing, nerve, influence, and family connections? He's at the mercy of his enemies, and more so of his friends. And he's about as beautiful as a cab-horse leaning against the Metropolitan Opera House at 12.30 A.M. dreaming of the plains of Arabia. Now, a woman asleep you regard as different. No matter how she looks, you know it's better for all hands for her to be that way.

"Well, I took a drink of Bourbon and one for Ogden, and started in to be comfortable while he was taking his nap. He had some books on his table on indigenous subjects, such as Japan and drainage and physical culture—and some tobacco, which seemed more to the point.

"After I'd smoked a few, and listened to the sartorial breathing of H. O., I happened to look out the window toward the shearing-pens, where there was a kind of a road coming up from a kind of a road across a kind of a creek farther away.

"I saw five men riding up to the house. All of 'em carried guns across their saddles, and among 'em was the deputy that had talked to me at my camp.

"They rode up careful, in open formation, with their

guns ready. I set apart with my eye the one I opinionated to be the boss muck-raker of this law-and-order cavalry.

"'Good-evening, gents,' says I. 'Won't you 'light, and tie your horses?'

"The boss rides up close, and swings his gun over till the opening in it seems to cover my whole front elevation.

"'Don't you move your hands none,' says he, 'till you and me indulge in a adequate amount of necessary conversation.'

"'I will not,' says I. 'I am no deaf-mute, and therefore will not have to disobey your injunctions in replying.'

"'We are on the lookout,' says he, 'for Black Bill, the man that held up the Katy for $15,000 in May. We are searching the ranches and everybody on 'em. What is your name, and what do you do on this ranch?'

"'Captain,' says I, 'Percival Saint Clair is my occupation, and my name is sheep-herder. I've got my flock of veals—no, muttons—penned here to-night. The shearers are coming to-morrow to give them a hair-cut—with baa-a-rum, I suppose.'

"'Where's the boss of this ranch?' the captain of the gang asks me.

"Wait just a minute, cap'n,' says I. 'Wasn't there a kind of reward offered for the capture of this desperate character you have referred to in your preamble?'

"'There's a thousand dollars' reward offered,' says the captain, 'but it's for his capture and conviction. There don't seem to be no provision made for an informer.'

"'It looks like it might rain in a day or so,' says I, in a tired way, looking up at the cerulean blue sky.

"'If you know anything about the locality, disposition, or secretiveness of this here Black Bill,' says he, in a severe dialect, 'you are amiable to the law in not reporting it.'

"'I heard a fence-rider say,' says I, in a desultory kind

of voice, 'that a Mexican told a cowboy named Jake over at Pidgin's store on the Nueces that he heard that Black Bill had been seen in Matamoras by a sheepman's cousin two weeks ago.'

"'Tell you what I'll do, Tight Mouth,' says the captain, after looking me over for bargains. 'If you put us on so we can scoop Black Bill, I'll pay you a hundred dollars out of my own—out of our own—pockets. That's liberal,' says he. 'You ain't entitled to anything. Now, what do you say?'

"'Cash down now?' I asks.

"The captain has a sort of discussion with his helpmates, and they all produce the contents of their pockets for analysis. Out of the general results they figured up $102.30 in cash and $31 worth of plug tobacco.

"'Come nearer, capitan meeo,' says I, 'and listen.' He so did.

"'I am mighty poor and low down in the world,' says I. 'I am working for twelve dollars a month trying to keep a lot of animals together whose only thought seems to be to get asunder. Although,' says I, 'I regard myself as some better than the State of South Dakota, it's a comedown to a man who has heretofore regarded sheep only in the form of chops. I'm pretty far reduced in the world on account of foiled ambitions and rum and a kind of cocktail they make along the P. R. R. all the way from Scranton to Cincinnati—dry gin, French vermouth, one squeeze of a lime, and a good dash of orange bitters. If you're ever up that way, don't fail to let one try you. And, again,' says I, 'I have never yet went back on a friend. I've stayed by 'em when they had plenty, and when adversity's overtaken me I've never forsook 'em.

"'But,' I goes on, 'this is not exactly the case of a friend. Twelve dollars a month is only bowing-acquaint-

ance money. And I do not consider brown beans and corn-bread the food of friendship. I am a poor man,' says I, 'and I have a widowed mother in Texarkana. You will find Black Bill,' says I, 'lying asleep in this house on a cot in the room to your right. He's the man you want, as I know from his words and conversation. He was in a way a friend,' I explains, 'and if I was the man I once was the entire product of the mines of Gondola would not have tempted me to betray him. But,' says I, 'every week half of the beans was wormy, and not nigh enough wood in camp.

"'Better go in careful, gentlemen,' says I. 'He seems impatient at times, and when you think of his late professional pursuits one would look for abrupt actions if he was come upon sudden.'

"So the whole posse unmounts and ties their horses, and unlimbers their ammunition and equipments, and tiptoes into the house. And I follows, like Delilah when she set the Philip Steins on to Samson.

"The leader of the posse shakes Ogden and wakes hin up. And then he jumps up, and two more of the reward-hunters grab him. Ogden was mighty tough with all his slimness, and he gives 'em as neat a single-footed tussle against odds as I ever see.

"'What does this mean?' he says, after they had him down.

"'You're scooped in, Mr. Black Bill,' says the captain. 'That's all.'

"'It's an outrage!' says H. Ogden, madder yet.

"'It was,' says the peace-and-good-will man. 'The Katy wasn't bothering you, and there's a law against monkeying with express packages.'

"And he sits on H. Ogden's stomach and goes through his pockets symptomatically and careful.

"'I'll make you perspire for this,' says Ogden, perspiring some himself. 'I can prove who I am.'

"'So can I,' says the captain, as he draws from H. Ogden's inside coat-pocket a handful of new bills of the Second National Bank of Espinosa City. 'Your regular engraved Tuesdays-and-Fridays visiting-card wouldn't have a louder voice in proclaiming your indemnity than this here currency. You can get up now and prepare to go with us and expatriate your sins.'

"H. Ogden gets up and fixes his necktie. He says no more after they have taken the money off of him.

"'A well-greased idea,' says the sheriff captain, admiring, 'to slip off down here and buy a little sheep-ranch where the hand of man is seldom heard. It was the slickest hide-out I ever see,' says the captain.

"So one of the men goes to the shearing-pen and hunts up the other herder, a Mexican they call John Sallies, and he saddles Ogden's horse, and the sheriffs all ride up close around him with their guns in hand, ready to take their prisoner to town.

"Before starting, Ogden puts the ranch in John Sallies' hands and gives him orders about the shearing and where to graze the sheep, just as if he intended to be back in a few days. And a couple of hours afterward one Percival Saint Clair, an ex-sheep-herder of the Rancho Chiquito, might have been seen, with a hundred and nine dollars—wages and blood-money—in his pocket, riding south on another horse belonging to said ranch."

The red-faced man paused and listened. The whistle of a coming freight-train sounded far away among the low hills.

The fat, seedy man at his side sniffed, and shook his frowzy head slowly and disparagingly.

"What is it, Snipy?" asked the other. "Got the blues again?"

"No, I ain't," said the seedy one, sniffing again. "But I don't like your talk. You and me have been friends, off and on, for fifteen year, and I never yet knew or heard of you giving anybody up to the law—not no one. And here was a man whose saleratus you had et and at whose table you had played games of cards—if casino can be so called. And yet you inform him to the law and take money for it. It never was like you, I say."

"This H. Ogden," resumed the red-faced man, "through a lawyer, proved himself free by alibis and other legal terminalities, as I so heard afterward. He never suffered no harm. He did me favors, and I hated to hand him over."

"How about the bills they found in his pocket?" asked the seedy man.

"I put 'em there," said the red-faced man, "while he was asleep, when I saw the posse riding up. I was Black Bill. Look out, Snipy, here she comes! We'll board her on the bumpers when she takes water at the tank."

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